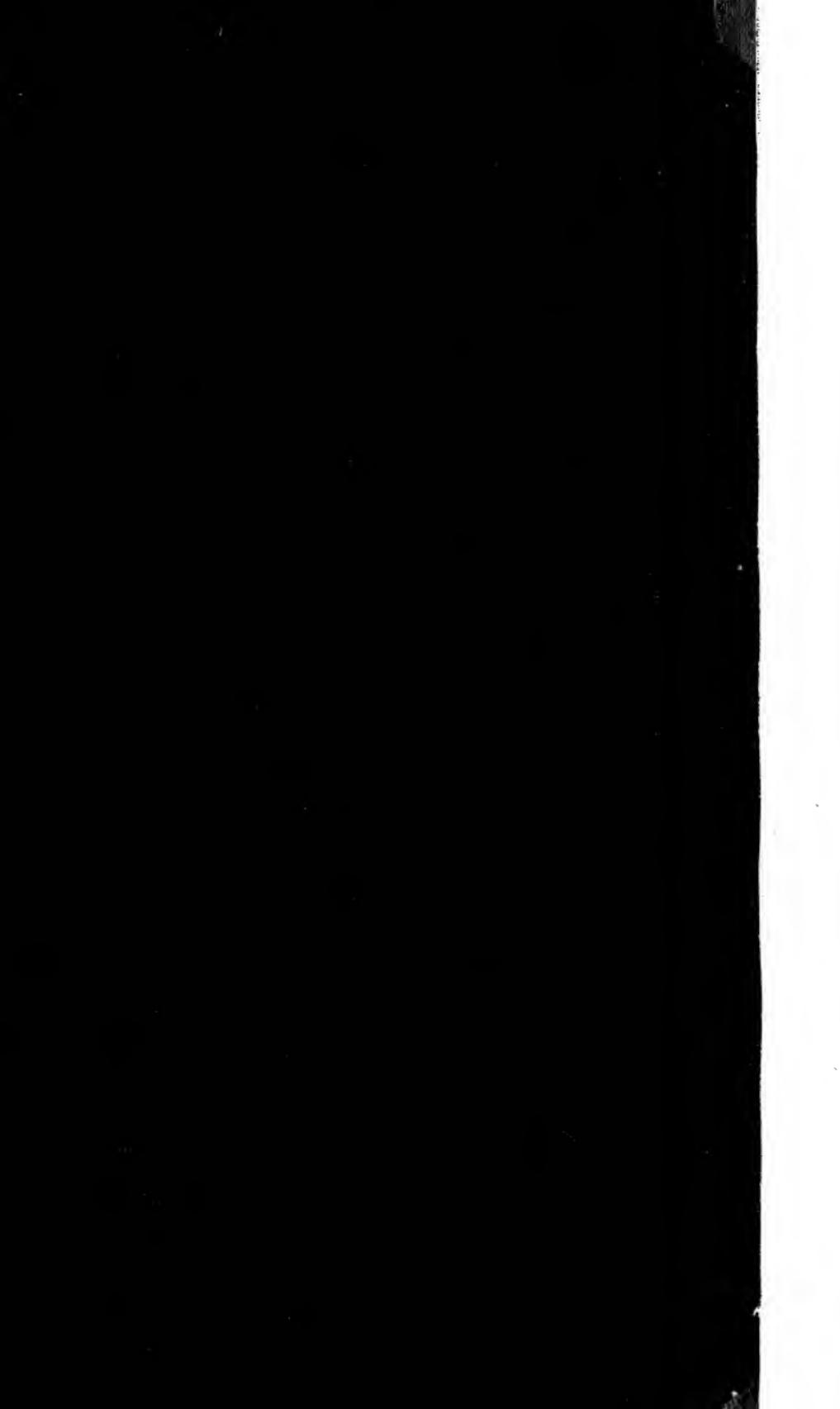


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THE RULING PASSION.
MY FIRST AND MY LAST LOVE.
CITY AND SUBURB.
ABOVE SUSPICION.
JOY AFTER SORROW.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

'GEORGE GEITH,' 'TOO MUCH ALONE,' 'THE EARL'S PROMISE,'
ETC. ETC.

A NEW EDITION.

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TO

Mrs Frederick Neian,

AS

A SLIGHT TOKEN OF THE AUTHOR'S REGARD AND ESTEEM,

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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HOME, SWEET HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT HOUSE.

A LARGE, old-fashioned, rambling white house, with red-tiled roof, standing high up on the side of a steep green hill ; a background of dark fir-trees crowning that hill, belts of plantation running down to a split oak fence ; a long broad strip of common-land, the turf smooth and close as velvet ; a narrow sandy country road—made up a landscape on which I gazed day after day, and year after year, from the windows of our cottage, till it became photographed on my brain, a very part and parcel of my memory.

It is not often people begin a story by telling what their eyes beheld ; but I am compelled to do so, since that house and those trees, the green hillside, the sward across which lay broad shadows and broader patches of sunshine, always pass before my mind's eye when I sit down in the twilight and think about those early days which are now a portion of the long ago.

My own home plays a very small part in the programme memory recalls when compared with that large white house, and the fir plantations reflected dark and grim against the horizon.

In the summer mornings, whilst the dew was still glittering on the grass, I used to look up at 'The Great House'—that was the name of the place—and seeing the blinds drawn close and

the shutters unopened, speculate concerning the lives led by human beings who lay so long a-bed. In the spring I longed to search the plantations for violets and wood anemones. When the autumn came, and the 'family' departed, as was its wont, to a seaside resort some thirty miles distant, I have trespassed amongst the firs in search of pine-cones, whilst all the time there was a terrible fascination for me in the idea of the large deserted rooms, of the high walled-in gardens where the flowers bloomed and the fruit ripened with never a one to admire or enjoy. Whilst winter's snows fell and winter's rain descended I was wont to marvel in what way the occupants of the Great House employed their time. In brief, whether with hand shading my eyes or nose flattened against the window-panes, through mists of driving rain or a veil of softly falling snow, I contemplated the view, that mansion on the hillside with wings—I did not mention the wings containing windows which resembled eyes—proved to me just what the far Western Land did to Columbus.

Bits of strangely carved wood, fruits of unfamiliar hue, were borne over the waters to him, and he longed to go forth and discover the country whence such wonders came. Waifs from that far-away sphere of society floated on the waves of imagination into my heart, and I too, like Columbus, became unconsciously an explorer.

I have been to the Great House in my time. Yes; and to a few other houses, which it is more than possible might never have been visited by me had those trees and that gaunt mansion failed to rear themselves before my childish sight.

Not higher above our modest cottage stood the Great House than the family who abode in it ranked socially above ourselves. The Wiffordes had been 'county people' from the beginning of time, and promised to be county people till the end of it. There never was a period of the world's history when 'a Wifforde of Lovedale had no existence; and for a man in all Fairshire, in which county Lovedale is situated, to be ignorant of the name only proved that he must be a very new comer indeed, and have spent the previous portion of his life in the remotest wilds of England. As for us, there was a time when it would have

seemed to me the height of presumption to mention the Mot-fields and the Wiffordes in the same breath. We were very insignificant folks indeed—insignificant not merely as compared with ‘county families,’ but insignificant also as compared with any one above the condition of a labourer. My grandfather had been only a small yeoman, farming his limited acreage of land as his grandfathers did before him ; and when his sons after his death agreed amongst themselves and with their mother that the small possession should be sold, and the proceeds applied to portioning their sisters and buying themselves businesses and practices, it was felt that the children of Reuben Motfield were trying to raise themselves in the world ; and the wise men of Lovedale shook their heads, and prognosticated that all sorts of evil must fall on those who were not content to remain in that state of life in which it had pleased God to place them.

Probably the only persons in the neighbourhood who approved of the sale were the Misses Wifforde. Reuben Motfield’s freehold, situated as it was in the very centre of land belonging to the Wiffordes, had always been to that family as sore a trouble as the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to Ahab. Over and over again had successive Wiffordes offered a potful of money to successive Motfields in exchange for their land ; and the consequence of frequent refusals induced in time as keen a feeling of hatred towards the Motfields as the dwellers in the Great House could be supposed to entertain for the family of a mere yeoman.

But they were gentlemen and gentlewomen, those Wiffordes of Lovedale. No doubt, had they set their minds to it, they might have found some means of acquiring the coveted land by other modes than that of purchase. Many a man has been ruined by modern Ahab’s for less reason than the desire to annex his inheritance ; and as Wifforde after Wifforde came into possession of the Great House, each with the same desire for that Lovedale vineyard, it has often seemed to me marvellous that not one amongst the number ever was tempted to try whether Might could not be proved synonymous with Right.

They did no such thing, however ; and when at length the time came for their wishes to be fulfilled—when Motfield's farm was offered to them by private contract—the two middle-aged spinsters, coheiresses of Sylvester, the last male Wifforde of Lovedale, behaved generously and kindly, as beseemed those on whom had devolved the honour of an honourable house.

They paid the sum asked—and it was high—without murmur or abatement ; nay, they did more. Through their agent they intimated to my grandmother that, understanding she was loth to leave Lovedale, and only consented to do so for the advantage of her children, they were willing, if such an arrangement should prove agreeable to her, to lease her the cottage already mentioned, the garden thereunto appertaining, and a small paddock, free of rent, for the remainder of her natural life.

What the meaning of the last words might be I have not the remotest idea ; but Mr Everitt, the agent, insisted upon that phrase being inserted. Supposing, however, my grandmother had lived, say, to the age of one hundred and twenty years, would she, by reason of that being an unnatural term of life, have been in danger of ejectment ? Alas ! she did not live even to the allotted period ; but suppose she had done so, what then ?

My grandmother was not very proud. No doubt it was from her side of the house those practical ideas were evolved which led to the sale of Motfield's farm ; and she gratefully accepted the Wiffordes' offer, and removed from her old home such of her belongings as the cottage and outbuildings could well contain.

The kitchen appliances, the parlour furniture, enough to fit up three bed-rooms completely, a pony and cart, a few fowls, turkeys, geese, and ducks, her favourite pigeons, her best milch cow ; these things did my grandmother gather about her.

An active Phyllis and a stout lad completed the *ménage* until my arrival at the cottage, which occurred exactly one year after Motfield's farm was added to the Wifforde estate.

There had been a trouble in the Motfield family once, and I

was the outward and visible sign of that trouble. A daughter of the house had been seen by an artist who came down to sketch Lovedale, and who intended to achieve a reputation out of it.

I presume he did not sketch Lovedale well, for he achieved no reputation, either out of that or anything else ; but if his painting did not prosper his suit did ; and Emily, the youngest of the Motfields, married him against the wishes and without the consent of her parents.

It was said this marriage killed my grandfather. Be this as it may, he never held up his head after the news came to him. He had loved that youngest girl with an exceeding great love, and had been proud of her beauty (the Motfields as a rule were not handsome). When he was out of spirits, or vexed, or cross, no one could so soon win a smile from him as Emmy, whose laugh he used to say was like silver bells ; who had dimples and bright eyes and long brown hair, and a tall supple figure ; and—who deceived him.

That was the sting. They were a straightforward, unsophisticated race, those yeoman ancestors of mine—blunt and even rude they might be at times ; but no neighbour could say he had ever been misled by one of them.

Honest towards men, honester, if that were possible, towards women, cherishing an ideal of what their wives and their daughters should be—which, strangely enough, their wives and daughters realized—the tidings that Emmy, not more than seventeen, had, while feigning compliance with expressed wishes and repeated commands, met Gerald Trenet secretly, and then as secretly left her home and married him, fell like a thunder-bolt upon that quiet household.

Not a bit of solace was it either to my grandfather to consider that his daughter had wedded a man who stood higher in the social scale than herself.

Most unaffectedly the Motfields looked down on all people who did ‘nothing but write or paint’—on all authors, ‘play-actors,’ artists. To their intelligence, such persons were the vagrants of society ; and save that they neither stole poultry

nor told fortunes, my kinsfolk looked upon the whole class as little different from gipsies.

Indeed, it is probable that they considered the gipsies the more influential, since even moderately sensible folk in Lovedale believed the aged crone and the picturesque young woman could read the future ; whilst no one had the smallest faith in the power of the ‘other Bohemians’ (I mean no offence) either to make their own fortunes or to prognosticate the fortunes of others ; and since I have been about in the world, I find this Lovedale article of faith by no means so uncommon as the Mormonite, for example.

Veiled under a very flimsy interest and curiosity, both high and low regard men who live by their brains as earning their bread-and-cheese upon a very intangible, suspicious, and greatly to be reprehended sort of fashion. They are sought after as great criminals might be—they are useful at London parties and oppressive country houses—in small provincial circles they serve to point a moral, and give piquancy to many tales ; socially they live in a sort of No Man’s Land, which the great and the lowly alike invade. Sometimes they are reported to be earning and spending large sums of money, the earning and the spending being alike begrudging by outsiders. More frequently they just manage to make both ends meet, and then there is general condemnation, as though hundreds and thousands living by their hands were able to do more.

But the Lovedale people were simple in their social creed as they were simple in their habits of life. They believed in the Wiffordes, the nobility, their member—who was always a Conservative—their clergyman, their minister, their doctor, and themselves.

Their firm faith in themselves served to rivet their faith in other existing institutions, and to render their dislike keen to strangers, who, so to speak, opening the door of the outer world, permitted chill and unfamiliar blasts to sweep through that happy valley.

Accursed were all strangers. Doubly accursed in the eyes of

Lovedale was Gerald Trenet, who carried off the rustic belle of that remote region, and broke her heart in London.

Yes, that was the story. The man who steals a wife from her own home and her own kindred, as he did, is not over likely to make a good husband ; and so, as I said, he broke her heart, and barely a couple of years after my birth she died, leaving me—all she had to bequeath—to my grandmother.

‘I have called her “Anne,” after you,’ she wrote. ‘May she turn out a better girl than I did !’ And thus, with a sort of mark on my forehead, I was sent down to the cottage, where I was taken in and cared for.

My childish memory holds the remembrance of no other home than that.

I have no recollection, mercifully perhaps, of any part of my early life which was not spent in Lovedale ; no far-away dreams of close rooms, of a smoky city, of harsh words, of shifts and poverty and unhappiness, anteceding the picture I have striven to sketch for you.

I had a father ; but when spirit meets spirit on the eternal shore, I shall only recognize him by a very poor miniature he left of himself.

I had a mother, with sad, sad eyes, and a wealth of rippling hair, whose face is familiar to me through the paintings of a now great academician, to whom, when he was but a struggling artist, she sat, thankful for the bread her beauty enabled her thus honestly to buy. No, there was nothing of sorrow, no shadow of shame, in those quiet happy days of childhood.

When about five years of age I remember that the groom, who each morning went down to Lovedale post-office to fetch the letters for the Great House, stopped at our gate and handed in an epistle with a large black seal.

I was out playing in the garden, and he gave it to me. Doubtless other letters from absent sons and daughters had come to my grandmother before this, which I carried in to her carefully, but that was the first of which I ‘took notice,’ as nurses say.

And I took notice of it for reasons following :

First, my grandmother took me on her lap and cried over me. I comprehend now—at that voice from the long-ago past—the wells of memory burst their bounds ; next, many letters were written to many people ; farther, a dressmaker was sent for, and in a couple of days I caught a reflection of myself in the glass—a child clothed in garments black as the raven's wing.

When on the Sunday following I went to chapel with my grandmother, many women kissed me—amongst others, the minister's wife—and called me a ' poor darling.'

I was not allowed to have out my toys or nurse my doll, except in a stealthy and surreptitious manner. When I escaped into the garden I was recalled indoors. People—even Phyllis before mentioned, and the boy now grown almost to manhood—looked at me compassionately, and spoke to me more kindly, if that were possible, than usual.

Yes, I was an orphan—not in that very peculiar sense of having one parent still living, which constitutes orphanage in modern phraseology, but in very deed.

I had neither father nor mother, and people pitied me. Why, I could not imagine then. Why, understanding fully what my poor father was, I cannot comprehend now.

What would my lot have been, I wonder, had I been dragged up amongst my father's surroundings—far absent from flowers and fields—never instructed in all the love of honesty and self-respect, of truthfulness and personal responsibility, which had descended like a family legend from one to another of the Motfields.

I can fancy my childhood, girlhood, womanhood, as each might under such auspices have been ; and I feel, spite of the commiseration I received—that commiseration which the world always gives to children when even the most disreputable of parents are in God's mercy taken from them young—that the Almighty knew what was best for us both, when He took first my mother from the husband who treated her so unkindly, and secondly, that husband before I was of an age to be useful to him in any way. What a life that would have been ! How I

tremble even now—knowing what I know of some phases of existence—to consider what such Bohemian association must have proved !

The voyage has not been all smooth, my skiff has not sailed into harbour across untroubled waters ; but yet—having just caught sight of those seas over which other vessels have tossed, of those rapids down which many a fair bark has rushed to destruction, of those whirlpools which have ingulfed unwary craft, and those awful rocks on which ship after ship has gone to pieces—I feel the compassion society extended to me because Gerald Trenet died before his feet had even touched the threshold of middle age was utterly thrown away.

Nothing indeed became my father so much in his life as leaving it. He had a long time given for repentance, and he repented. Probably had health been restored to him, both illness and remorse would have become mere memories ; but it was not to be.

He died in his thirtieth year, and I and a very few inferior paintings were all that remained on earth to tell that Gerald Trenet ever had a being.

But after all, though I have no memory of him, he was my father ; and when I, looking at some of those pictures that now hang on the walls of the room in which I write, think of his uncontrolled youth, of his wild life, which could scarce have held an untroubled memory in it—of his lonely sick bed and his bitter repentance—I trust with a trust almost amounting to faith, that if I am ever permitted to enter through the strait gate, I shall find that God has likewise been very merciful to him a sinner.

CHAPTER II.

MY WORLDLY PROSPECTS.

SOME time before his death my father received a legacy. Speaking correctly, indeed, that legacy was the cause of his death.

A distant relative, of whose very existence he was scarcely aware, dying intestate and without any nearer heir, the whole of her modest patrimony, amounting to something like twelve hundred pounds in money, together with a cottage, a quantity of old-fashioned furniture, a silver tea-service, various articles of ancient china, a dog and cat, and a couple of acres of meadow-land, came unexpectedly into his possession, and almost from the hour it did so his fate was sealed.

To a man who has never had five shillings before him in the world, whose life has been a succession of perpetual shifts, twelve hundred pounds seemed an illimitable sum of money, and naturally he set to work spending it at the rate of somewhere about a couple of thousand a year.

The cottage being a picturesque place, covered with wisteria and climbing roses, situated in the midst of soft English scenery, struck his artistic fancy, and so he kept it, and the furniture, and the plate, and the meadow-land, and the dog and cat, and old servant intact, determining that some day he would take three months' holiday, and paint landscapes which the public should appreciate at last and purchase. He now possessed the only things he had previously needed to insure success—money and leisure—that was the way he put the state of the case to one of his friends—and he intended to make a name and a fortune.

Whether on his deathbed it ever occurred to him that he had also lacked genius and industry, I cannot tell; certainly while he was strong and well, he believed in himself with a faith which almost seemed deserving of a better return. The self he

set up as a god and worshipped failed him utterly. It never did anything worth talking about, and it did a great many things that were best not spoken of.

His was a lost, wasted, unprofitable, sad life, so far as man ever knew. Perhaps there may have been another side to the picture which man never saw ; but in a purely worldly point of view, his whole existence was a failure. What he might have done with money and leisure in the way of landscape painting, it is impossible to determine, although it seems to me easy to guess ; but as he never made but one slight sketch from the day he came into possession of his small fortune, the chances he gave himself of achieving fame were small indeed.

Not in rambles through the woods, not in catching the effects of sunrise on the distant hills, not in reproducing on canvas the river which came brawling under the gray old bridge and pursued its way between banks where grew alder-trees, and brambles, and ferns, and wild flowers, did he spend the holiday he had vaguely purposed to devote to art.

He spent it in dying. There lay the sweet home landscape before him, but his hand was too feeble even to attempt to reproduce it. Other men might make fame and fortune out of it, but for him the dream was over. He had come away from boon companions, away from the rattle of dice and clicking of billiard balls and shuffling of cards, away from the glaring gaslights and the wicked town, to die ; and he did it, and they buried him under the shadow of the ivy-covered church-tower in the stillness of a summer evening.

He expressed no wish to see me before he went ; indeed, the first intimation my grandmother had of his illness was contained in that letter to which allusion has already been made as announcing his death.

Probably he felt, as he stated in a long narrative which he directed to be forwarded to Lovedale after his decease, that the sight of me would recall memories too painful for endurance ; but it is also likely that he dreaded still more an interview with my grandmother, whose heart he had bereaved.

What remained of his fortune he left to her in trust for me.

The cottage was to be let, and the income derived from it paid over half-yearly to 'the said Anne Motfield, for the maintenance of my beloved daughter Anne Trenet.' The money—three hundred pounds—was to be placed in the Funds, and the interest to accumulate till I reached my twelfth year, when, if my grandmother thought fit, a certain portion might be annually withdrawn, in order to permit of my being properly educated. The silver, securely packed, came down to Lovedale likewise in trust for me, as did the paintings to which I have referred.

Altogether I was regarded by the whole Motfield family as a lucky little child ; and from the day when, dressed all in black, I accompanied my grandmother on a visit to one of her sons, who dispensed as an apothecary in the nearest large seaport town, I felt an access of civility, on the part of all my uncles and aunts, for which, at my then tender age, I was totally at a loss to account.

I had not grown any less troublesome, or tiresome, or cross, or sulky than on the occasion of previous visits, but I was very rarely reminded of my shortcomings. Farther, my grandmother was not reproached for 'spoiling me' and for 'indulging me as she had never done any of her own children.'

It was not imputed to me as sin that my hair would fall out of curl and my bonnet get awry, neither did I hear any fault-finding on the subject of my new clothes.

Altogether we had a good time, and I know now that my father's death and legacy caused rather a pleasing excitement in the Motfield family. Hitherto they had looked upon me as a troublesome, and likely to be expensive, interloper—the child, not of a struggling, honest, hardworking man, but of a 'ne'er-do-well,' whose propensities to Bohemianism, or to strange ways of life, as they expressed it, I had no doubt inherited ; but the three hundred pounds, and the cottage, and the silver, caused them to regard me with a certain amount of respect, though not indeed as quite a desirable addition to the family ; and as my grandmother presented her daughters and daughters-in-law with rather expensive mourning, I can perfectly understand the diversion in my favour which was so perceptible that I remarked at

the apothecary's tea-table, in the presence of strangers, evidently labouring under the impression that I was saying something original—

'Grandma, isn't Aunt Jane kind?' Whereupon a pleased silence fell upon the guests, while Aunt Jane, who had just offered me, contrary to custom, a piece of cake, looked delighted, inspired by which appreciation I took up my parable and proceeded—

'Last time we were here she wasn't kind; she slapped me, and called me a brat.'

After that I have a vivid memory of being carried from the room and slapped again; not, however, by Aunt Jane, but by my grandmother, who had not so light a hand in administering punishment as in making pastry.

All excitement, however, must sooner or later pass away, and the flutter and bustle which ensued after my father's death gradually subsided. Although the minister's wife still spoke kindly to me when we came out of Lovedale chapel (my grandmother was a Dissenter), and the stately housekeeper from the Great House occasionally patted me on the shoulder if we overtook her on her way to church, the memory of my orphan condition was gradually forgotten, and by the time my black frocks were worn out, and replaced by more cheerful garments, the fact of my ever having had a father or a mother seemed obliterated from the recollection of our acquaintances, who rarely called me by my proper name, but talked of me as Anne Motfield, or old Mrs Motfield's little grandchild.

The years came and the years went—years peaceful and happy. I was allowed to run about by myself—much more than children usually are, I fancy—and I used to sit on the big boulders in the stream that ran down from the Great House estate into the quiet valley below, telling myself fairy tales by the hour together, or singing and crooning old-world ditties while I made wreaths and crowns out of the wild flowers I had gathered in the woods.

Few were the story-books our humble home boasted, but I had read them over and over again. From the cottage where

my father died had come, with the silver, some boxes that, besides a few old-fashioned brocade dresses, contained sundry volumes, that I devoured by day and dreamt of by night.

Was ever anything more wonderful and more delightful than the tales those old books contained—tales of wild romance—of enchantments—of supernatural appearances—of wizards—of lovely princesses—of cruel stepmothers—of ladies whose beauty was beyond compare—of knights *sans peur et sans reproche*?

There are no such books now-a-days—there are no books (of prose) that appeal to the imagination at all; and perhaps that may be the reason the nineteenth-century young people are growing up such an unimaginative and practical race.

What every one writes at the present moment, or at least tries to write, is a reflex of actual life—the life we have to live, whether we like it or not. Authors try to reproduce a faithful transcript of the sayings and doings of this weary work-a-day world, through which walk men and women with sad anxious faces—where virtue does not necessarily mean success—where wickedness is often triumphant over innocence—where the guilty thrive and flourish—where beauty is oftentimes a fatal possession—where genius and courage are beaten ignominiously by money and chicanery—and where the battle is always to the strong, and the race to the swift.

It is the world as it has been since Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden that story-tellers now delight in portraying.

For me, give my fancy that garden, with all manner of exquisite fruit and lovely flowers, to wander through, or even a pre-Adamite literature, which shall resemble in some sort the vague delicious reading I drank-in, feeling it indeed possessed all the sweetness of stolen waters.

My grandmother did not approve of much reading on the part of young or old. For a girl to be sufficiently educated meant, to her understanding, that the said girl could read without having to 'try back'—that she could spell in three syllables—that she could do her sampler and her seam—that she could add up a column. If, added to this, she had a sufficiently

good ear for music to catch up a tune and sing an old-world ballad, Mrs Motfield considered her accomplished.

Perhaps it was for this reason she rather deferred to her son Isaac's wife, the Aunt Jane already mentioned, who, besides having a wonderful gift for housekeeping, was wont to sing by special request in the evenings, 'Cherry Ripe,' 'The Young Troubadour,' 'Annie Laurie,' and other ditties of the same class and period, which were much admired, and occasionally drew tears from my grandmother's eyes.

Mrs Isaac Motfield's minstrelsy never caused me to weep; but no doubt this hardness arose from the amount of original sin I am now aware that lady believed my little soul contained.

It was darkly rumoured that Mrs Isaac, if business went well, intended her talent to be perpetuated in the persons of her children. When they came to suitable years they were to be taught to play the piano, and I believe some overtures were made for the rickety spinet that had come with the books, the brocades, and the legacy.

As the spinet fortunately, however, happened to be mine, and I was not of an age to be a party to its sale, the negotiation fell through, and the Misses Motfield, at a later period of this story, learnt the mysteries of Cramer's exercises on a five-and-a-half octave instrument, manufactured by Clementi, I should think at about the time of the First Captivity.

Not that it is for me to cast stones at that ancient piano, since I picked out my notes upon a still more venerable spinet.

It was impossible to keep me from that heirloom. Had there been a key to it, I should have been deprived of my greatest source of amusement on wet days; but providentially the key was lost, so I wandered over the notes—one-half of which were dumb—when Mrs Motfield was busy or absent, to my heart's content.

One day—one memorable day—there came a person who was in the habit of seeing to the welfare of our kitchen clock; a huge thing in a case, with an absurd moon rising above its dial. There was no lock to it either, and as I was in the habit of stopping it when I did not wish to be sent to bed at abnor-

mally early hours, and of putting it forward when I desired the speedy departure of obnoxious visitors, the clock frequently required Mr Lambton's services.

Not that Mr Lambton minded how often he called. He liked the snug kitchen—the little table covered with a snowy cloth—the muffins made by my grandmother's own hands—the sweet fresh butter—the newly-laid eggs—the dainty rasher—the strong cup of tea—which were duly prepared for his delectation.

On the day in question, however, his arrival was unexpected, and as Mary chanced to be scrubbing out the kitchen, I took him into the parlour till such time as the tiles should be all clean and ruddy from the administration of spring water and a final polishing of red brick.

There, anxious to do the honours, I showed him my father's paintings, which he said were "uncommon fine;" the brocades, that he pronounced to be as "grand as anything worn by the Misses Wifforde theirselves;" the books with plates, his judgment of which disappointed me, as he inclined to the opinion they wanted a "dash of colour," whilst I liked the soft shading of black into gray, as I liked the gloom of the woods in bright summer weather. Finally he espied the spinet, whereof, he informed me, he had heard.

'An ancient article; been made a few years.'

'Yes,' I said, 'it is a great deal older than I am.'

'Are you sure of that, miss?' he asked, evidently thinking to make fun of me; but I only replied—

'Yes, I am, and I would give anything to make it talk all over.'

'Talk all over,' he repeated; 'whatever does the little lady mean?'

'Why, listen,' I answered, and I ran my childish fingers over the keys; 'one half of them don't speak, they have not a word to say.'

'Miss,' he said, after a moment's silence, 'if a person could put that to rights for you, what would you do for him?'

'Give him all I have in the world,' I answered; and straight-way I rushed off to my own little room, whence I returned with a

halfpenny money-box, the top of which I tore off as I came down the narrow stairs.

‘Look,’ I cried, pouring out the contents ; ‘this is all I have now, but grandmamma gives me half-a-crown on Christmas-days and a shilling at Easter, and I shall have five shillings when I am eight years of age, if I try to be a good child till then ; and, oh, make my spinet talk, and I will be good, and you shall have everything I get.’

Then Mr Lambton, though he was a very commonplace sort of individual, looked at me half comically and half reproachfully.

‘Child,’ he said, ‘I would not take the money of an orphan like you, if you counted it out before me in golden guineas ; but I will put the wires to rights for you if you will sing me a song.’

‘I cannot sing,’ I answered, blushing scarlet, getting hot to my ears in a very agony of shame. ‘Grandma says I cannot, and so does Aunt Jane, and they do not like me to try.’

‘Sing for me,’ he replied ; ‘Mary says you can lilt like a lark.’

‘Come down the garden, then,’ I agreed ; and so I let him out of the house, along a walk bordered by thyme and marjoram, amongst which our bees kept busy holiday, across the paddock to a point where commenced a steep descent, planted with fir-trees, at the bottom of which the river Love in its summer idleness crept lazily over the stones.

Then, with my face half averted, I began, ‘The Banks of Allan Water.’

Where I had learned the ballad I cannot tell. I only know that before the first verse was half over I had forgotten everything but my song, and never remember anything else till, that song finished, I stood in a surprised silence once more in the familiar world.

Mr Lambton never spoke a word, and I turned to look at him.

‘Miss Annie,’ he began, ‘Mary was quite right ; but still I do not think it is a good thing for a baby like you to be able to sing like that.’

Whereupon we went back to the house together—across the paddock, up the path where the bees were still busy, and into the kitchen, now wearing its usual air of comfort—both slightly dispirited.

‘Never more,’ I decided, ‘never for ever should any human being ever hear me try to sing again.’

For I felt just as if I had committed some sin.

CHAPTER III.

NEWS FROM THE GREAT HOUSE.

THAT the Motfields ever met in solemn conclave to discuss my demerits is unlikely ; but that they arrived at a unanimous opinion on the subject is lamentably true.

They decided as with one voice that I was ‘stupid’ and ‘odd.’ Even my grandmother, my dear grandmother who loved me, once in a moment of unguarded confidence expressed her regret that I was not more like other girls ; and I felt abashed at my shortcomings.

Subsequent experience has rendered me sceptical as to whether being like other girls would materially have benefited my position. However, she was sorry that I did not resemble the race ; and I was sorry none the less perhaps because I could think of no means of remedying the evil.

Unhappily, I was myself ; and every attempt I made to resemble other people only made the difference more apparent. Alas, in those days it was very true indeed that I was Annie Trenet, and nobody else. Just a child with strong affections, which rarely, however, made themselves demonstrative ; a child unblessed by Nature with good looks or the capability of saying clever things ; a child who as the years went on grew painfully shy, whose artificial life was that spent amongst grown-up men and women and little girls and boys, but whose real life was

passed in holding silent but entrancing interviews with fairies and princesses, with vague kings and queens, with heroines who were miracles of beauty, and heroes like unto nothing since the creation of the world.

‘Yes’—as my Aunt Jane said—‘it was a very good thing indeed I had been provided for, since I never could have provided for myself.’ Doubtless the good lady was right; at all events, no circumstance in my career has ever caused a difference in her opinion.

‘Some people,’ she said to me recently, ‘are born with silver spoons in their mouth;’ and although I could not quite understand her grammar, I comprehended that three hundred pounds, with the cottage afore honourably mentioned, had, in her opinion, provided a very enormous ladle for me.

The difficulty in my life as I grew older was, that I could not talk, probably from an intuitive knowledge that if I did talk, I should not be understood.

Dearly I loved my grandmother; but I was well aware she would have regarded the conversations I held with various imaginary personages as the wildest nonsense—which no doubt they were; but then it is difficult—for me, at least—to enter into the ins and outs of a life the conversations in which are all sense.

I was not in the least like my aunt’s children. They could play *Di tanti palpiti* with all its repeats without a great deal of stumbling before a mixed company, and I could not play anything excepting to myself.

To be sure, I was self-taught. I played the old psalm-tunes I heard at chapel, and picked out the songs wherewith Mary propitiated our solitary cow. Farther, when Tom whistled, most likely for want of thought—since no cross-questioning of mine ever elicited an original idea from that taciturn youth—I appropriated the air for myself; but what did all that prove? Simply that I was odd. It was all very well to play from ear, but if you could not read from book, what should an ear profit?

So said my cousins’ music-mistress; so said my aunt.

And besides, I could not play, except just in a mooning sort

of fashion to myself ; and when I sat down to the Clementi five-and-a-half, I had no idea of setting my dress out to advantage on the rickety stool, as was the habit of Jemima Jane.

I liked best to get into the corner with a book, and strive to close my ears to Jemima's performances. Perhaps that was ascribed to envy ; and—well, possibly I did sometimes in those days wish to be more like my cousin and less like myself.

Only, surely that was appreciation and not envy. One thing I can certainly state, however—I do not envy Jemima Jane now.

In the town where Uncle Isaac resided—that seaport to which the Misses Wifforde annually repaired for change of air and scene—there were attractions for me quite independent of my cousins' society. First of all, there was the sea, which I loved then as I love it now. The little room at the top of the house which I shared with a couple of the younger children overlooked the shore ; and night after night, when they were fast asleep, I used to get up and gaze with what I comprehend to have been a passionate awe and reverence at the waste of waters, sometimes reflecting back the moonlight, at others lying black and sullen under the midnight sky.

Next, there were plenty of people in the streets, and what seemed, in comparison with my lonely home, crowds innumerable—ladies in gay dresses, gentlemen on prancing horses, soldiers in their uniforms—it was a garrison town—sailors in their round shiny hats and blue guernseys, fishermen in sou'westers, children, tradespeople, great shops with plate-glass windows, boats, beggars, carriages—altogether a wonderful change and excitement for me, for whom, however, Fairport held two stronger attractions than any I have yet mentioned—its ancient church and the organ that church contained.

I should not like to be buried in the piece of consecrated ground which lies round and about the old church dedicated to St Stephen ; for the graves are so many and the space so small that the earth is like billows, and has by this time raised itself up to the mullioned frames of the painted glass windows. As a

child, that burying-ground always gave me an idea of the dead moving about in their last resting-place. It looked to me as though they tossed from side to side. Now being less romantic or imaginative, I object to the place on other grounds ; and am glad to remember that in all human probability, when my time comes, I shall be followed by a few who love me and by some others to whom God has enabled me to do a kindness to a little churchyard in a hamlet I wot of, where the morning sun shines brightly on a great square tomb, which has many names inscribed and many tributes engraved upon it, to the memories of men and women who tried to do their duty in that sphere of life in which Providence had placed them.

Spite of its graveyard, however, I remember St Stephen's with an abiding affection. Religion never seemed to me the same thing in our whitewashed conventicle at Lovedale as it did within the gray walls of the church at Fairport. No doubt the instruction imparted was equally good ; but the sentiments I derived were different. Religion at Lovedale was a duty—not altogether disagreeable perhaps, but still a duty ; religion at St Stephen's was to me, at all events, a romance.

People who have gone to church all their lives long, who have never in their childish days been called upon to eat that strong meat which, amongst even the most liberal of Dissenters, is provided impartially for the sucking babe, the middle-aged man, and the octogenarian tottering to the grave, cannot form the faintest idea how the interior of an old church, and the church-service itself, impresses any young person with imaginative tendencies, who has been weaned on the sterner and more forbidding diet of ordinary nonconformist worship.

Monuments with a story to them instead of our bare walls, only relieved by one bald tablet, white marble edged with black, setting forth the virtues of a certain Joshua Sandells, who had largely contributed towards the erection and support of our barn-like edifice ; monuments high as the roofs of the side-aisles ; monuments to forgotten grandes ; monuments that portrayed kneeling lords and ladies ; monuments rich in death's heads, hour-glasses, scythes, and skulls.

More especially there was one I remember—one which I shall remember to my dying day. It was right above the pew we occupied (my aunt was a Churchwoman, and had, of course, carried Uncle Isaac with her), and the inscription on it ran as follows :—

Sacred to the Memory of Captain Edward Arthorp, Lieutenant James Godfrey, Henry George Rogers and Frederiek Sunderland, Midshipmen of the ship Cardigan, which foundered on the Gray Rock, January 1st, 1771.

‘The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters.’

How often I have read and re-read that inscription, I could not repeat ; how vividly the figures of men praying, with drooping flags and broken spars and the ribs of a shipwrecked vessel in the background, come back to me, I might never hope to tell.

As easily might I strive to explain the feeling of utter desolation (as regarded man) with which that monument inspired me ; as easily could I make my readers understand how the waves dashing in upon the sea-shore seem even now to bring it before my mind’s eye—how, when I hear the choristers chant—

‘They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters ;

‘These see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.

‘For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.

‘They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths ; their soul is melted because of trouble.’

—I see a wild sea-shore, and the Gray Rock where that tragedy happened, lashed by waves white and cruel ; I see those men struggling in a last fight for life ; I see them buffeting the billows, clinging to spars, trying to seize the rope which always fell short, striving to keep afloat till succour came, passing through a thousand years of torture to add a few years to existence.

To which succeeds a great calm. I am in an old, old church dimly lighted. The organ swells, and my heart throbs, and down the aisles there floats, chanted by the choristers, ‘A thousand years are but as a day in His sight.’

To the left that monument ; a few hundred yards more to

the left the gray, desolate, hungry sea ; my own little life opening vaguely before me. That is all ; and yet perhaps enough to show my relations were right, and I not quite like other girls of my age and station.

More than once, when I was staying at Fairport, the Misses Wifforde were there likewise, taking in their grand manner change of air too. Each afternoon they were wont to drive up and down the parade, rarely, however, looking at the passers-by, but keeping their eyes fastened on the coachman's back-buttons in a fashion which filled me with a great awe and reverence.

Of course, I admired the manner of our ladies when at home in Lovedale ; but it impressed me far more when, in the midst of the world and its excitements, they were still sufficiently mistresses of themselves to consider nothing so worthy of admiration as the family crest. It was not frequently, however, that I had opportunities of contemplating this calm indifference to objects external to the house of Wifforde ; for it was always the very height of the Fairport season when they went thither for the benefit of the sea-air ; and in the height of the season every man and woman in the town either let his or her house or took in lodgers ; and as my uncle was no exception to the general rule, even my small person usually proved at that period an article of furniture too much.

The Misses Wifforde had a house of their own on the cliff—a dull-looking abode with a heavy balcony and a great expanse of hall-door, only relieved by a handle as large as a turnip, and an immense knocker, the design of which was a wreath of oak-leaves and a lion's head.

That dwelling was the quintessence of ponderous and long-established respectability ; and I shall never forget the amazement I felt when one day I distinctly heard the notes of 'Rory O'More' whistled in its balcony.

I could not believe my ears. I looked up ; I could not believe my eyes : there stood a young lady, not more than in her first teens, perhaps less still—a young lady leaning over the balcony, looking far sea-ward, and whistling—ay, as well as our Tom.

It was very rude, but I could not help stopping to listen.

‘He was bold as the hawk,
She was soft as the dawn,’

the young lady proceeded, breaking off into song ; but apparently whistling was more her forte, and she whistled on, swinging her foot up and down against the ironwork in time to the tune.

Suddenly she caught sight of me, and I was made aware of the fact by this sentence—

‘Little girl, if you stand there another second, I will drop a bonbon into your open mouth.’ And she pelted one at me ; whereupon I ran off as fast as I could, and stayed as much indoors as possible for a few days, lest the fact of my boldness coming to Miss Wifforde’s ears, she should send a detachment of soldiers to my uncle’s house, and have me taken off to prison.

From the dormer window of that attic chamber to which, in the season, Mrs Isaac Motfield’s younger children were consigned, I subsequently beheld the young lady who could whistle driving along the parade with the Misses Wifforde. She was clad in spotless muslin ; she had on a black silk pelerine—pelerines obtained at that time, as they have again, under a different name, within the last three years—and a quiet straw bonnet, trimmed with a cool-looking blue-and-white ribbon. Hats had been previously, and have been since, but they were not in those days ; not a bit quiet was Missy, and I could perceive that the calm atmosphere which usually pervaded ‘the ladies’ was disturbed. They could not prevent her turning round and laughing at everything which struck her as ludicrous. Miss Wifforde frequently tapped her with the point of her parasol, while Miss Laura spoke to the offender, as it appeared, more in sorrow than in anger. That any one could venture to laugh in the presence of ‘our ladies’ seemed to me nothing short of miraculous ; that any one could laugh twice after being rebuked once was a still greater miracle ; and yet I saw that girl do it—I saw her almost scream with laughter as she returned, and it appeared to me she was making merry at Miss Wifforde’s expense.

Early next morning I awoke with the sun shining full on

my face ; and long before any one else had even, I believe, turned in bed, the question was settled to my own satisfaction. The poor young lady must be out of her mind ; and oh, what a trouble for the Misses Wifforde !

Somehow, from that time there seemed to me a ladder—a long one, it is true, but still a ladder—set up, by which my thoughts might travel to and peep in at the windows of the Great House, the inmates of which were intimate with sorrow.

In this idea I was entirely mistaken ; at least, if the Misses Wifforde had sorrows, they were in no way connected with the young lady of the balcony ; but it served the purpose of fostering a vague sort of human sympathy towards ‘our ladies,’ who had always seemed to my previous imaginings set as far from me as the east is from the west.

Afterwards I knew more about Miss, and also a young gentleman I had once beheld driving down to Lovedale church in the Wifforde carriage. On one bright April afternoon Miss Hunter, my ladies’ lady, asked shelter from us till a shower should be over.

The dependents at the Great House had ever been friendly towards our cottage, but not familiar ; and I could perceive that my grandmother regarded the request and the visitor with distinguished consideration.

Hospitality was proffered, and Miss Hunter induced first to taste a glass of cowslip wine, which she honoured with her approval, and subsequently to consent to take off her bonnet—it was an immense black erection—and remain for tea.

Over that meal she unbent considerably ; and whilst I, having duly put back my chair, and betaken myself and a book to the window-sill, was supposed to be deaf, as I had certainly been dumb, Miss Hunter informed my grandmother that the Misses Wifforde, after long consideration, were agreed as to the advisability of adopting an heir.

‘They want to do justice to all parties,’ the old lady went on ; ‘and as their only near relations are equally close, they have decided to adopt Master Sylvester for the next heir, and that he shall marry Miss Elizabeth.’

It was just like arranging a royal marriage ; and my grandmother expressed her surprise no more than she might have done had Miss Hunter announced that one of the blood-royal was about to contract an alliance with the Princess Amelia Sophia Agatha Caroline of Popolinasklinski.

‘ You know,’ proceeded Miss Hunter, ‘ they are both of them sort of distant cousins to the family ; and the family has always kept up its relationships. Mr Sylvester is the grandson of a cousin of my ladies’ father ; and Miss Elizabeth’s father was son to that Mr Cleeves who was at one time so much at the Great House in the late Squire’s time. You must surely remember him, Mrs Motfield—a handsome, spirited gentleman ; they said he was the best seat on horseback in the county ; but he was killed by a fall while hunting, for all that. I believe he and Miss Wifforde would have married ; but the Squire set his face against it ; for he wanted her to accept Captain Ralph Wifforde, who afterwards died in India. Dear me ! there is hardly a lady or gentleman who used to come to the place living now. To think that of all the Wiffordes there is not one of the name left excepting my ladies ! The house, as a rule, is quiet as the grave. My ladies cannot bear either to go out visiting or to receive visitors. I do not know how it will be when Mr Sylvester comes to live with them ; for it is not likely a young gentleman could be content with only their society.’

‘ And when is the marriage to take place ? ’ asked my grandmother, as Miss Hunter at length gave her a chance of edging in a question.

‘ Oh, bless your heart ! not for years. Miss Elizabeth is little more than a child ; and Mr Sylvester is, after a manner of speaking, still just a boy ; but I believe it is all as good as settled that Mr Sylvester is to be the heir, and to take the name of Wifforde, and to marry Miss Elizabeth when she is eighteen.’

‘ What sort of a young lady is Miss Elizabeth—is she handsome ? ’

‘ Not in my idea,’ replied Miss Hunter, who was a tall woman, and held herself very erect, and had a Roman nose and

high forehead and light-blue eyes, and hair that, despite her years, refused to turn white ; ‘ not in my idea. Indeed, what my ladies can see in her passes my understanding. She is a pert little creature, with more knowledge of the world and its ways already than either of them will ever have in their lives. She turns the place upside down when she is in it. She never was at the Great House but once ; and every servant was happy the morning she left. She has not a trace of the Wiffordes about her ; but she can wind my ladies round her finger. They say she is wonderfully clever ; but I am sure I do not know in what way. She could not hem a handkerchief if it were to save her life ; and she told me once she thought a square of Axminster carpet would look just as pretty on the footstools as those beautiful groups of flowers that Miss Wifforde worked with her own hands. She calls my ladies dear old things—yes, to their faces ; and she will go into the stables, Mr Ackworth tells me, and walk round the very hoofs of the horses in a way that frightens even the grooms.

‘ Mr Ackworth entreated her one day to be more careful lest she should get a kick from one of the horses ; but she only broke out laughing, and said in her scornful way—

“ Do you call those things horses ? Ah, you should go into the stables at Dacre Park, and see the beauties my uncle has ! Horses ! why, these creatures could not kick if they tried ! If they ever knew how, they must have forgotten the way, I should think, about a hundred years ago.” ’

‘ I wonder at ladies like the Miss Wiffordes enduring such doings,’ said my grandmother, indignantly.

‘ We all wonder they have Miss Elizabeth staying with them, was the reply ; ‘ but I do not think the person lives who could prevent her doing precisely what she likes. Mr Ackworth says he cannot account for the Miss Wiffordes’ infatuation except on the ground of witchcraft. She goes about the garden whistling—’

‘ Yes, I heard her once at Fairport,’ I eagerly interrupted, letting my book fall in my excitement ; and had I been a witch, I could not have produced a greater effect.

It was evident that Miss Hunter at all events had forgotten the fact of my presence, and her startled and angry look frightened me as much as my speech had alarmed her.

‘Good gracious !’ she said, turning to my grandmother, ‘I never thought of the child ; and here have I been talking to you as, I am sure, I would not have talked to any other person outside of the Great House. Come here, little girl ;’ and she planted me before her, fixing me with her light-blue eyes. ‘I hope you have learned your Catechism, and the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer ?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ I answered.

‘Then you know what will become of children who go and repeat things it was never intended their ears should have heard ?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘And you will try to be a good child, and forget all your grandmother and I have been talking about ?’

Once again I should have answered, ‘Yes, ma’am,’ but at this juncture my grandmother came to the rescue.

‘You may trust Annie,’ she said. ‘I have never known her carry a story in or out of any house.’ Whereupon, moved by sheer gratitude, I began to cry.

Almost immediately afterwards Miss Hunter, declaring she must go, resumed her bonnet, put on her shawl, lifted the skirt of her thick black silk dress till I could see the topmost tuck in her snowy petticoat, and departed, leaving me under the impression that I had, in some dreadful and mysterious manner, been put upon my trial.

CHAPTER IV.

QUIET TALK.

How the news which the facile tongue of my lady’s lady had so glibly communicated affected the conversation of us humble folk, only people who lead or have led a monotonous life like ours

will be able to understand. In the winter's evenings, when, our early tea over, my grandmother sat knitting stockings, while I toiled along the dreary expanse of a long seam, we talked much about the adopted heir and his wife that was to be.

The whole affair had by this time been positively settled, and everybody in the county knew that at Christmas Mr Sylvester was coming to take up his residence at the Great House, and that in due course he meant to marry Miss Elizabeth, who in the interim was at her own home, undergoing some educational process, which the Misses Wifforde considered would have the effect of rendering her more fitted for the high calling whereto she was destined.

It is only fair to say that every one (the domestics at the Great House alone excepted) felt, so far as we could tell, satisfied with the arrangement proposed. By the county families it was considered an eminently just and prudent proceeding on the part of the owners of the Wifforde estate.

So long as a nearer relative remained, the rich spinsters had naturally felt that the ancestral property was scarcely theirs thus to dispose of; but now, when death had swept every direct heir and heiress off the face of the earth, when the broad acres promised at their death to become bones of contention amongst far-away kinsmen and kinswomen, it seemed both right and fitting that an heir should be named, and brought up to feel that sense of responsibility which always ought to be a characteristic of those likely to become the owners of large estates or great wealth.

And this youth—this Sylvester—had ever been very dear to the ladies at the Great House. Between his mother and themselves there had, up to the time of her death, existed an almost romantic attachment; and it had never been any secret that the Misses Wifforde paid the expenses of his Eton and college career, and that they always intended to provide handsomely for him when he came to man's estate.

All these particulars, and a great many more, my grandmother detailed as we sat at work with one solitary candle between us, thus whiling away the tedium of the December nights; whilst Mary was whiling away the tedium of her evening with a certain

young man from the village, who had been devoted to her for some few years. Years were as nothing in that part of the world, which seems to me now the more singular, since they passed so slowly.

I was older than my actual age, and getting somewhat of a companion to that dear old guardian, who found in me one virtue, that of being an admirable listener.

Not one of the tales of lords and ladies was to me more entrancing than my grandmother's old-world talk about the Wiffordes of Lovedale, their friends and their relatives.

Marvellously exciting were her narratives of how she had seen, over and over again, the hounds in full cry, and the huntsmen at full gallop, passing through Motfield's farm. The days of her youth came back no doubt in all their freshness and beauty as she talked, for there was a breath as if of the early morning air hanging about those reminiscences.

'I can remember well,' she said, 'the last Squire bringing home his bride. I was a little girl then, less than you are now; but it seems like yesterday that I saw the arches and the flags, the carriages and the prancing horses, that I heard the men hurrahing, while the Squire took off his hat and drove through them bare-headed, and his wife bowed to right and to left. There were dinners and balls, and the whole place used to be one blaze of light. Ay, there were great doings from that time on till her death; but after that it seemed as if the Squire could not bear the sight of friends or strangers.'

'She was a beautiful creature. At Court, where they say every lady is beautiful, she was more so than any. I remember the day she died quite well. I was standing at my father's door, when a groom from the Great House rode past like one mad. His horse was covered with white foam, his spurs were bloody—I could see that as he passed; so I ran down the field to where my father and brother were mowing, and cried out that something dreadful must have happened at the Squire's.'

'So there had. In half an hour the man and Dr Elliott passed our house again, riding side by side together.'

"What is the matter?" my father shouted as they went by.

But Alick--that was the groom--never stopped. He just turned in his saddle and said, "My mistress!"

"Before the doctor got there she was dead, and they buried her and the little baby, who would have been heir had he lived, before the next Sunday came round. The Squire, they said, was like a man distraught; he used to cry over her coffin like a child; and I have seen him myself--ay, fifteen years after--standing beside her grave late at night, when he thought no one was about.

"That Mr Cleeves was a relative of his wife; and it was said, although he opposed the idea of Miss Dorothea marrying him on account of his being poor and much in debt, still he would have given his consent in the end; indeed, I heard he had sent, telling Mr Cleeves he might return; but it was too late. He had married some girl without a halfpenny, and Miss Wifforde stayed single for ever after."

"And why did not Miss Laura marry?" I inquired.

"People said she was too fond of her father and sister ever to leave them; but I always had my notion she liked a cousin who did not care very much about her. But there, child, fold up your work, and we will get to bed. Why, it's nine o'clock already, I declare!"

Thus, night after night, the generations of the Wiffordes, and the deeds they did, and the wives they married, and the horses they rode, and the lands they owned, were rehearsed to me; and when my grandmother was not talking about their former doings, she and I spoke softly of Mr Sylvester and Miss Elizabeth.

Over and over again I repeated when and how I had seen that young lady, and was applauded for my caution in having kept my own counsel.

"Still, you might have told me, Annie," added my grandmother, after the fashion of one person reproaching another for keeping some dainty titbit all to herself.

And, indeed, in our solitary life not sharing any piece of news did seem a piece of wanton greediness; but then, as I said and truly, I was afraid to share it, lest she should be angry at my having ventured to stop even for a moment under the balcony.

The Wiffordes were as gods to me, and I feared the conse-

quences of letting it be known I had intruded even unwittingly into their holy of holies, and in that sacred place heard the profane sound of whistling.

Christmas came, and with it the new heir. We saw him drive with the Misses Wifforde to church on the Christmas morning ; the family chariot was had out for the occasion, and consequently we obtained from behind our curtains a good view of him. A young gentleman of one or two-and-twenty, with brown hair, a broad white forehead, and a grave thoughtful cast of countenance.

‘Like the Wiffordes,’ said my grandmother. My own memory of the family, however, only containing portraits of Miss Laura and Miss Dorothea, two prim and starched old maids, the likeness so apparent to her failed to strike me.

Yes, he had come. Apartments re-papered, re-painted, re-decorated, re-furnished, were set aside for his exclusive use. It was hinted he had a bias for learning, that books written in strange tongues lined the shelves ranged round his private sitting-room ; that the library of the Great House, long unused, was to be rearranged ; that his aunts—so, for convenience, the household began to style them—were as proud of his learning as they were fond of himself.

And in truth Sylvester Wifforde had in him the making of a most courteous gentleman.

I shall never forget one Sunday when, meeting us suddenly at a turn of the narrow footpath, he stepped aside into the mud of the high road with as much gallantry as though my grandmother had been young and pretty, and his equal.

She curtseyed and thanked him, apologizing likewise. *He* took off his hat and smiled—such a smile, so sweet, so frank, she could speak of nothing else for a week.

Yes, he had come at last, this Mr Sylvester, this Wifforde in all but name ; a gentleman and a scholar. Could any choice have been better than that the ladies at the Great House had made concerning their heir ?

He was an admirable horseman too, and that was well ; for I doubt much, had he lacked the capability and the will to go

across country, whether, considering the family traditions, he would have been deemed a fit successor to the Wiffordes of old ; but he could ride, not a doubt of that. Often when he has been returning home to dinner, a little late probably, since we had finished our tea, I have seen him riding like a very Nimrod along the sandy road ; his reins loosely held in one hand, and his other, the whip in it, resting on his thigh ; his feet well in the stirrups, his knees gripping the saddle, whilst his black horse Templar, delighted to have 'got his head,' thundered along to the lodge-gates.

Ah ! youth is very beautiful to our imagination, if age be very dear to our hearts ; youth is the poem, age the tragedy ; youth is romance, age something more real and pathetic than reality ! That young man was the embodiment of romance to me, and, looking at him, I pitied the two gaunt ladies who, although they might have been young once—a fact it was, however, impossible for me to believe—could never be so any more.

In those days I often marvelled why the Misses Wifforde did not travel, in order to behold those places of which I had read, and which my soul desired ; but I marvel at their snail-like existence no longer. Looked up to as gods in Lovedale, regarded as something like royalty in Fairport, what glimpses of the Holy Land, what foreign seas, what unclouded skies, what gigantic mountains, what historic towns, could have compensated to minds constituted like theirs for the full shock of a revelation that there actually existed inhabited countries where the Wiffordes of Lovedale were unknown, where the worship they received from all of us would have seemed as a heathen bowing down before wooden idols ?

Sometimes when my imagination was inspired with a reperusal of those beloved books, in the pages of which citrons and oranges grew wild, that were overshadowed with cork-trees, or perhaps choked up altogether by the luxuriant undergrowth of American forests, I would astonish my grandmother by suddenly asking her whether she supposed either of the Misses Wifforde had ever been in Castile, or if she thought Mr Sylvester would take a journey to Peru,

‘Mércy upon us, child !’ the dear old soul would answer, ‘what should people like them want junketing about in foreign parts ? It is only sailors and soldiers, and restless idle vagabonds, that ever go to those outlandish places ; and whatever it is that keeps your head running upon them passes my comprehension. I am sure you never heard me talk of anything out of Fairshire.’

Which was indeed true ; and yet her statement failed to produce the effect she evidently thought it ought to have done, for on one particular occasion I answered—

‘But, grannie, when you were down at Fairport, and saw the sea, did you never wish to sail away and away to some island where the palms and the cocoa-nuts grow, and where the woods are full of humming-birds and parrots, and where flowers like those that were at the show can be picked wild ?’

Whereupon my relative said frankly that she never had ; and proceeded farther to declare, she was heart-vexed to find a grandchild of hers filling her mind with such a parcel of rubbish.

No good, she added, could come of dreaming and drawling instead of minding my seam. Books had done more harm in the world than anybody would ever be able to reckon up. It was reading poetry that caused all my poor mother’s trouble. It might be well enough for gentlefolk, who had nothing to do except pass the time ; but for such as us, reading was about one of the worst things a girl could take to.

With infinitely more to the same effect, the peroration being that she was much afraid I should never be of use to myself or anybody else—which I felt at the time to be a most unjust remark, as I really did my best to darn our stockings properly, and to keep the singular collection of ornaments our sitting-room boasted free from dust.

Such feeble acts of propitiation to the household deities utterly failed, however, to satisfy my grandmother.

‘You are getting a great girl,’ she was wont to say—her remark must be understood to refer to age, not stature—‘and if you are ever to be fit for anything, you ought to be learning. Why, when I was no bigger than you, I could knit a stocking and turn the heel of it as well as I can do now. I had done a

sampler, for which my father got a rosewood frame. I could make a pudding ; and, a couple of years after, not a loaf of bread or pat of butter was used in the house that I had not the handling of. I sometimes think, as your Aunt Jane says, that you will be fit for nothing but to sit up to a pianoforte playing—and you cannot do that well. I wish I had burnt yonder old thing when it came into the house, and the books with it. You are not a bit like your cousins. They are content to play their tune and come away ; but you would like to be strumming morning, noon, and night ; and I believe you would, if there was nobody by to hear you. Bless my heart, if the child is not crying again ! A body cannot say a word to you now without your beginning to fret.'

And this was true. I had a passion for music, which restraint only made more vehement. Now I am aware that, as I grew older, I must, with my temperament, have been just such a trial to my grandmother as a duckling proves to a hen. Then I knew she was often as great a trial to me as the hen is to the duckling.

Whenever I tried to get off to my beloved pond, she called me back, and clucked me up under the secure but uncomfortable shelter of her wings.

She did not understand such ways. She was afraid I had taken after my father. She should not let me go back again to Fairport ; my uncle spoiled me.

Dear, dear grannie, how you loved me through it all ! but yet how many a night you have made me sob myself to sleep !

I was the sole duckling amongst the Motfield hens and chickens. What marvel, therefore, that my proclivities should occasion surprise, not to say alarm ?

Wishing for what is vain, I often, musing in the twilight, wish with an unutterable longing that the woman who cared for me with such untiring love could have lived to see me now, to understand that it is possible for a duckling to follow its instincts and yet still return safe to land after all.

Perhaps in a better world she has learned what she certainly never thoroughly understood in Lovedale—namely, that even

amongst the grandchildren of a yeoman there may be as much difference in temperament, character, and aspirations as amongst those of an earl.

But *any* difference in the members of a family astonished my grandmother. That such a person as Miss Elizabeth Cleeves could have developed—I use the word because ‘retrograded’ might not be strictly correct—out of the Wiffordes, was to her a never-ending source of wonder.

To her, for a creature such as Miss Hunter described to be the product of a respectable series of ancestors, was as great a phenomenon as though our staid cow Cowslip had presented the household with a six-legged calf.

Such things were, it is true; but they had never been amongst the Motfields till that artist unhappily took it into his head to visit Lovedale. Such things were; but they had never happened amongst the Wiffordes till Mr Cleeves, thwarted in his design of marrying his cousin, espoused Gertrude, niece of General Dacres, who had been born and passed a considerable part of her life in India, and was generally supposed to have done nothing in her existence except lie on a sofa and read novels.

In my humble way I fear I caused at the cottage as much trouble as Miss Elizabeth to the ladies at the Great House.

Once I saw her ride past with Mr Sylvester. Yes, she was a hoyden; galloping over the strip of green turf as hard as her horse could go, and all the while turning round in her saddle and laughing at Mr Sylvester, because he seemed to disapprove of her mad pace.

‘Grannie,’ I asked, ‘did the Misses Wifforde ride much when they were young?’

‘No, child,’ she answered; ‘they were always ladies.’

From which remark I inferred that, amongst the traditions of the Wifforde family, equestrian exercise for ladies was considered masculine and unbecoming.

CHAPTER V.

AT FAIRPORT.

AMONGST the attractions of Fairport was its theatre, which has not been hitherto mentioned, because until I attained my twelfth year I had not the remotest idea what the inside of a theatre might be like. Externally the building was uninviting. It was a cross between the Methodist chapel and the town-hall, but dirtier than either ; and in the season it had bills stuck upon it, as in like manner there were notices of meetings, tolls, rates, and sermons posted on the doors of the other edifices above mentioned.

To me the word 'theatre' conveyed no impression. I could not understand what was meant by acting. That world still remained a *terra incognita* ; not even the piece of carved wood referred to in my first chapter had been wafted from the foot-lights to the shores I inhabited.

The Motfields were not a family given to dissipation. They were a money-saving, home-loving people, and whilst my uncle attended to his customers, my aunt saw to her household. They were ambitious in their way, but it was a modest way. He wanted a plate-glass front for his shop instead of the small panes, which suggested rather than revealed the beauties of his crimson and blue bottles. Her soul longed for a satin dress and a gold chain of a very heavy and cumbersome pattern which obtained at that period of the world's history. Farther, she desired one son should be a curate, the other remaining with his father and the drugs ; whilst my uncle's cherished desire was that Jemima Jane, his firstborn, should mate with the son of a woollen-draper in a large way of business, and who hoped some day to be mayor.

To a certain class in London the title of Lady Mayoress seems a thing to be coveted ; and to my uncle it appeared

desirable that one of his daughters should be married to the son of a possible provincial mayor.

The origin of such desires being matter past finding out, I can only record his wishes ; and deduct therefrom the moral, that a person whose horizon happened to be bounded by them was not in the least degree likely to be in the habit of wasting his shillings and half-crowns on the pit or dress circle of a local theatre.

Once, I believe, he had gone with an order to witness the tragedy of *Damon and Pythias*. Having myself in later times been a spectator of that enlivening play, I can well understand a man might be content ever after to leave the drama as enacted in Fairport to the patronage of his idler and richer neighbours.

But at length there came to Fairport a company the names composing which caused a flutter and excitement amongst all ranks and classes in the town.

Hitherto we had esteemed the young ladies arrayed in scarlet riding-habits and the foreign-looking gentlemen attired in black velvet, who went in procession along the parade on those rare occasions when a large tent was pitched on a certain piece of common land lying outside the town, as amongst the most remarkable of created beings ; but now, when rumour declared that the then queen of song was coming, had come, to Fairport, every other feeling gave place to an uncontrollable curiosity to know something about her.

The local papers had each an article on the opera in general and that special opera-singer in particular. Over their cards staid tradesmen dealt out musical and financial gossip ; how they understood she had a finer voice than Madame This, That, and The Other, whom more than one said they had heard at Her Majesty's when they visited London in such a year.

A large lithograph of her as Norma appeared in the shop-windows, and it was generally rumoured that the income she derived from her shakes and cadenzas was about equal to that of the county member. In addition to which, we all somehow learnt that her extravagance and her charity were about equally matched, and kept rapid pace together.

She had arrived. It was on a Saturday night that one of the waiters from the Crown Hotel brought the news of her actual appearance to my uncle. They had all arrived, in fact, and the hotel was turned upside down.

Nothing in it pleased any one. The *prima donna* had brought down her own cook, maid, and lap-dog ; the tenor was at the moment of his, the waiter's, departure engaged in a stormy interview with the landlord ; one of the minor stars had despatched him, the speaker, for eau-de-Cologne, a tooth-brush, a box of quill pens, and two sticks of black sealing-wax, with a hurry which scarcely left the man's speech intelligible.

Already every flower in the Fairport nursery-grounds had been cut to decorate the dinner-table ; while the chief, or rather chieftainess, of the party had ordered in enough shrubs in pots to convert her apartments into a bower.

Farther, they jabbered together in a language, or rather in many languages, unintelligible to the waiter ; they laughed much, they ate much, and they drank more. In fine, he concluded they were a 'queer lot ;' but 'then, all them play-actors were the same ;' at least, so he understood. 'He had not seen much of them himself, he was glad to say ;' such remark being intended as a side-wind at The George, where the tragedians and comedians who occasionally honoured Fairport with their presence were wont to put up.

All these statements my uncle repeated over the supper-table to his wife, and we children, being permitted to sit up on Saturday as well as Sunday evenings to partake of the various dainties provided, had the satisfaction of having our curiosity whetted as our appetites were appeased.

What a night that proved to me ! For hours I lay dreaming dreams, wide awake, about that strange land whence these strangers had come ; and when I fell asleep, it was but to wander on into still more unfamiliar scenes, peopled by ladies who wore crowns and gentlemen who strode along with swords by their sides, and who each and all bore some distant family likeness to the circus troupe, as well as to the heroes and heroines whose ideal portraits graced the pages of my favourite volumes.

How eagerly, when morning broke, I longed for the time to arrive when, prayer-books in hand, we should accompany our elders to church, where I had promised myself a sight of the new arrivals !

That any human beings, except beggars, sailors, and maids-of-all-work, should absent themselves from St Stephen's, was an idea which had never entered into my mind.

Even the very soldiers duly marched up to the sacred edifice, and after service marched away again to the sound of as many musical instruments as are mentioned in the third chapter of the prophet Daniel. Why, then, should the lady, whose features were familiar to me through the medium of the lithograph already mentioned, remain away ?

But she did—they all did. They came not to morning service, or to afternoon, or to evening ; and my disappointment, though unconfessed, was so great that I could eat nothing, and had in consequence a dose of physic compounded by my uncle's own hands.

It was not easy to swallow, but it was better to take it than confess my folly. So I crept up to bed, and looked out on the sea bathed in the moonlight ; and then fell asleep, wondering what it could seem like to be a rich lady, able to go about where and when she chose, and even take a drive instead of going to church.

That, it was darkly whispered, the stranger had done, and what gave colour to the story, was the known fact that several of her party had gone out for a row across the bay.

It was frightfully wicked, but the very wickedness had a fascination for my imagination, stimulated as I now know it to have been by a sermon preached that morning, the gist of which was a commination against all persons who performed plays, all persons who went to witness plays performed, and all persons who wished to witness them.

In church, conscious of my own guilt as regarded the last clause, my soul had, if I may say so, metaphorically hidden herself away beneath the sandals of my shoes. When I came out into the sunshine, however, my spirits revived ; and as we

walked home along the parade, the moral of the sermon seemed to me much less true than I am bound to say it does now.

Dear to me—ah, how dear no words could ever describe—is the aspect of a well-filled, well-lighted theatre. The very smell of the place recalls memories that can never be quite forgotten till I have ceased remembering ; the sound of the instruments makes me feel like a war-horse scenting the battle. Yes, I love play-acting ; but I am not quite sure whether the curate of St Stephen's was not right after all. At all events, there is a wide difference between the doors of Drury-lane, for instance, and the strait and narrow gate.

Clearly my aunt was of that opinion, for she made many disparaging remarks concerning singing men and singing women, about people who could earn as much money in a night as many a hardworking father of a family could in a year. She had a good deal to say also about wickedness in high places, and instituted a considerable number of comparisons between virtue and non-virtue, which then conveyed no meaning to me. Nevertheless, I was glad to get away from the supper-room and the talk, such as it was, to my chamber, looking out over the moonlit sea.

Next evening, spite of the sermon, all the rank and fashion of Fairport flocked to the theatre. I saw plenty of youth and beauty driving past—ladies with ringleted hair, carrying choice bouquets ; some coquetting with fans, some leaning a little forward to look out of their carriage-windows. It was a vision of ‘ fair women ;’ but no human being has ever faithfully described the effect such a vision produces on a woman except the author of *Jane Eyre*, and no one need attempt to do so after her.

Late that night, hours and hours subsequently—so it seemed to me, though the length of time was an entire delusion—I crept from my couch to see those carriages flash back again ; and then, after the last had passed and the sound of its horses’ hoofs died away down the parade, I crept, with a vague mental hunger upon me, back to the little cot, with its white hangings and snowy coverlet, that never after that visit held me again.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE OPERA.

ON the Thursday following that evening when, to the delight of a crowded audience, *Der Freyschütz* was put upon the boards as creditably as could be expected, considering the limited resources at the manager's command, my Aunt Jane, her eldest son, and her eldest and youngest daughters started off to pay a visit to Daniel Motfield, another uncle of mine, who had established himself in a town some fifteen miles off as a corn-merchant.

He was only a corn-merchant in a very small way ; but his wife brought him some money, and as it was known that at her father's death all he possessed would come to her and her children, Mrs Daniel seemed to my Aunt Jane a person whose friendship was to be desired : a sentiment Mrs Daniel reciprocated, wherefore the two ladies visited each other as frequently as the intervening fifteen miles of country would permit.

When Mrs Daniel came to Fairport, she brought some of her children, and remained for a day or two ; when Mrs Isaac Motfield went to Deepley she was invariably accompanied by some of her offspring, who were wont to speak rapturously of the pleasures to be found, and the dainties to be enjoyed, at their Uncle Daniel's house.

Towards myself Mrs Daniel Motfield adopted a very simple course. Virtually she ignored my existence, of which I have now every reason to believe she at that period strongly disapproved. After kissing my cousins all round, she would indeed so far unbend as to give me one finger that I had to shake, and say—

‘ Well, Annie, how are you ? ’ or, ‘ So you are here again, Annie ? ’

Once I remember she gave me six walnuts ; but that was because I had, most reluctantly, presented to her a beautiful little

needle-book, that had come with the pictures and the brocades and the spinet from the old house where my father died.

Mrs Daniel still preserves that needle-book, and exhibits it to her acquaintances as a proof of the generous disposition her dear niece possessed even when quite a tiny child—the praise being totally undeserved, as I never gave anything away with less good will in my life.

I did not like Mrs Daniel ; and yet when I stood on the doorstep and saw my cousins drive off in the bright sunshine, my heart was so lonely and sad, that I had much ado to keep from bursting into tears there and then.

So few people cared for me. I tried hard to be good ; but in my case certainly goodness was its own reward, for no one appeared in the smallest degree interested about the matter.

For the moment I almost hated the sight of my cousins' bold healthy faces, as they turned round and waved their hands in farewell.

One of them had insisted on my lending her a brooch, which it was certain she would never return, as she publicly stated to her mother that Annie had given it to her ; and I lacked moral courage to enter a protest against the assertion. My grandmother would, I knew, be vexed at its disappearance. She had not wanted me to take it to Fairport, from which place I generally returned home as bare of valuables as a plucked fowl is of feathers ; but my entreaties carried the day, and now the brooch was gone, together with a reticule, knitted of blue-silk cord, lined with white silk, and adorned with tassels — another of the small possessions which, my cousin's soul desiring, it had.

And yet I was ungrateful for thinking about these things or feeling hurt because they did not take me with them. Was not a visit to Fairport as much of an 'outing' for Annie Trenet as a visit to Deepley for them ? Had not my aunt kissed me, and said I was to be sure and take good care of my uncle and Tommy ?—the rest of the family being from home. Had she not given directions for a pudding to be made, and a cake baked ? Yes, that was all quite true ; but I wanted, nevertheless, to have

been driving along the road I knew so well from description : through the woods, across the ford, down the long hill to Deepley. I wanted to see Mrs Daniel's drawing-room, where the blinds were always down, lest the sun should fade the carpet ; where the chairs were tied up in brown holland pinafores, that if undone, revealed glimpses of amber damask ; where there was a real glass above the chimney-piece, and three painted urns with gilt handles and knobs—my cousins said gold handles and knobs, but I have since rejected this account as fallacious—on the mantelshelf ; where there were cabinets filled with foreign shells and feather-fans—the gifts of a brother in the merchant-service ; where there was bead-work that faintly shadowed forth Mrs Daniel's love of the elegances and refinements of life ; and where the very table-covers were wrought in tent and cross-stitch, to the admiration of all permitted to behold.

Farther, I desired to ride round the paddock on Dapple, a certain staid pony, who had, I feel confident, a poor life of it when those boisterous young folks took him in hand ; and I wished to pick up walnuts myself, and to eat of the fruit of the luscious mulberry-tree, which grew—I knew the very spot—in the middle of a grass-plat, which was, to quote Jemima, ‘covered and covered with berries, that were always falling from the boughs.

Then there were pet rabbits and an Angola cat, and a little white dog, and a large black one ; and not one of these possessions had I ever beheld, although my cousins must have seen them over and over again.

It may not seem much, after all, to have fretted about ; but small trials are great to little people, and with a very sorrowful heart I ascended the staircase, and went into the drawing-room, and looked out over the sea. Then I went up another flight, into my aunt's bed-room, and looked over the sea again ; after which I took a third view of the same scene from my own chamber.

By this time I felt better, and remembering Tommy, who had been induced to bear the parting from his mother without making public lamentation only by the promise of lozenges.

which he was then enjoying, decided on taking that young gentleman out for a walk.

As a rule, Tommy was not a desirable companion ; but on this occasion he proved, as his mother would have said, as 'good as gold.' Whether it was the effect of the lozenges eaten, or of the prospective pudding to be eaten, it is difficult to say ; but the usually fractious imp demeaned himself towards me with an amiability and a decorum foreign to his nature.

Did I wish to go on the sands, he did not immediately desire to remain on the parade ; did I suggest walking through the town, he was not instantly seized with a passion for collecting shells and sea-weed ; and accordingly Tommy and I, with a rare harmony, wandered first along the beach, and returned home by a circuitous route, which led past the terrace and the hotel, and then through that street where the theatre was situated.

There I stopped, and read slowly the huge flaunting bill, which set forth that on Thursday evening would be performed *Il Barbiere*, and on Saturday *Eurydice*—announcements which dispelled the small amount of cheerfulness acquired during our walk.

Should I ever grow up and go to theatres ? Should I ever hear any music different from that in St Stephen's—anything which should fulfil my ideal of minstrelsy ? Should I ever be in the same house with those beautifully dressed ladies I had watched on Monday night, and should be looking at again that evening, as they drove along the parade ?

Well might Tommy accuse me of crossness, and threaten to lift up his voice unless I told him a story on the spot ; well might my uncle, bringing a healthy appetite with him to dinner, ask me if I were ill, that I sat so silent, and ate nothing.

' I am quite well, thank you, uncle,' I answered ; but I could not help unbidden tears filling my eyes as I did so, and no doubt he half guessed the source from whence they sprang, for he said, cheerfully and kindly—

' Never mind, my little maid. If Mrs Daniel does not want you now, somebody else will want you hereafter. Put a bright face on it ; there will be money bid for you yet.'

Then I did what I dare say astonished him mightily : I got up, and threw my arms round his neck, and put my lips to his, Tommy the while, in an access of amazement, surveying the tableau with his mouth filled so full of pudding, that he had subsequently to swallow it with a gulp.

In that moment I think my uncle's memory leaped back over the barrier of years. He was a boy again, and my mother but a mite of a child, and he and she were wandering through the fields together, bird-nesting, primrose-seeking, butterfly-catching, blackberry-gathering, nutting, as they were wont ; for she had been his favourite of all the flock, which was the cause, perhaps, of the comparative kindness I received at the hands of his household.

He was young again, for the moment, and she was alive ; but ah, well-a-day ! youth passes away like a shadow ! And here were he and I—he middle-aged, I a child as she used to be—speaking heart to heart with a sort of mute appeal.

‘ I tell you what, Nannie,’ he remarked, after a second’s pause : ‘ you and I will walk up to the theatre to-night, and see all the gentlefolk going in to hear the great singer. Should you like that ? ’

‘ Oh, uncle ! ’ I exclaimed.

‘ Me too,’ put in Tommy ; which observation we both ignored, feeling our happiness would not be increased by Tommy’s presence ; and silence, in his opinion, giving consent, the young gentleman remained satisfied.

What an afternoon that was ! What a glory there seemed over the sea ! what a beauty in the sunshine, in the long stretch of sandy beach, in the white-winged vessels, ay, even in the boats drawn up on the shingle ! How I devoted myself to Tommy ! What tales I told him, what pictures I exhibited before his expressionless eyes, what pains I took with the child, physically and mentally, nobody would believe. We played at cat’s-cradle ; I taught him the royal game of goose. I seemed lifted up into a sort of seventh heaven, since at length one person seemed vaguely to understand I lacked something necessary to happiness.

For the first time in my life I believe I was that day popular ; and I had my reward, yea, in very truth.

Duly set out was the tea-table—thin bread-and-butter and thick slices of bread duly graced the board. Jam appeared in a small glass dish, and the cake, which already Tommy had devoured in anticipation. There likewise was the sugar-basin into which his fingers strayed to such an extent that, finally presenting him with a spoonful, I placed it on the mantelshelf beyond his reach.

Everything was ready excepting the tea. But where was my uncle ? How did it happen that he, usually punctual, should not have appeared ere now ?

The servant, from whom I sought information, reported him as absent ; and Tommy, struggling at the moment to lug a heavy chair to the fireplace in order to reach the sugar-basin, paused in his efforts on hearing her reply, and entreated me to cut the cake.

‘ It must be cut some time,’ urged that terrible child, ‘ and pa won’t mind.’

‘ If I did anything of the sort, your papa would be excessively angry,’ I replied, with that calm dignity which befitted my age.

Whereupon Tommy pulled a face at me, and recommenced his infantile labours.

He had just got the chair into position, and was going to mount it, whilst I, on my part, was about to remove the sugar-basin to a still greater altitude, when my uncle burst into the room.

‘ Nannie,’ he cried, ‘ how should you like to go to the opera ? ’

‘ Oh, uncle ! ’ I gasped out, like one who had been asked a question too strange to be true.

‘ I am not jesting, my little girl,’ he said. ‘ As I was coming down the parade, I met Mr Bilbay, of the *Flying Mail*, and he said he had a box for four, and that if I would like to hear Madame Serlini, he had two places to spare. So I told him my little niece was music mad, and that if I might bring her too, I

would be there. You must put on your best bib and tucker, child, for it is the stage-box, although I do not suppose anybody will notice us.'

It was all fairyland after that. In no earthly habitation, I am sure, was the tea poured out that night. In Arcadia I ate a slice of bread-and-butter, and cut Tommy enough cake to make a dyspeptic of him for life. But the digestion of some children is wonderful, and I believe he went to bed more willingly in consequence.

I waited to pour out a third cup of tea for my uncle, who, perceiving the impatience I tried in vain to hide, then said—

‘We have not much time to lose, dear. Run upstairs, and put on your best frock, and let us be going. If you have not got a dress of your own good enough for the occasion, look in your cousins’ drawers, and take what you need.’

But I had a dress with me—a lovely dress, that must, so Miss Hunter declared, have been embroidered in a French convent, and served probably as a christening-robe to some one who lived and died before I was thought of.

My grandmother, thinking it a pity so rare a thing should lie hidden any longer, had brought it forth from amongst the brocades, and made an upper skirt of it for me, which I wore on such rare occasions as a visit to the minister’s wife, or a tea-drinking at the schools, over a fine white muslin slip.

The bodice had, under Miss Hunter’s advice, been likewise skilfully manipulated ; and when I appeared in this attire, with a curious Indian necklace round my throat, and my short hair—it was the custom then for children to wear short hair—brushed out and made to appear as well as possible, Uncle Isaac—arrayed, to my astonishment, in a white tie and a swallow-tailed coat, which latter had done service at his wedding—looked at me approvingly, and said—

‘You will do, child. Put on a thick cloak, Nannie,’ he added, ‘for you will find it chilly coming out of that warm theatre.’

And in two minutes more we were really, actually, truly, on our way to the opera.

I could not believe it possible, and yet still I did believe it. I would have danced along the parade, had not a sense of decorum restrained that ebullition of feeling. The only way in which I permitted my rapture to evidence itself was by giving my uncle's hand, which I held, a great squeeze from time to time.

He too seemed very happy. On the whole, we were just like a couple of children out together for a holiday, too enjoyable to be talked about or fully realized at the time.

When we got into the High Street, he turned into a draper's shop, where the following dialogue took place—

‘Good evening, Mr Nelson.’

‘Good evening, sir.’

‘I want a pair of gloves for my little niece. We are going to the opera.’

And so the gloves—the first pair of kid I ever had in my life—were bought and paid for, and put on and buttoned by kindly Mrs Nelson, who stooped down and kissed me when she had effected that feat.

In a drawer upstairs lie two gloves, that, small though they are, were then too large for me ; and I never can look at them without a sorrowful longing that I could go back and live that evening over again, and touch once more the hand of him who was thenceforward so stanch and tender in his love.

What a blessed visit that of Mrs Isaac Motfield to Mrs Daniel Motfield proved to me ! And yet I had been discontented and ready to cry when the party started. I felt ashamed of myself, and in an access of gratitude and happiness gave Uncle Isaac's hand such a terrible squeeze, that he said, laughingly— !

‘There is no necessity for you to break my bones, Nannie, although we are going to the opera.’

‘But I can't believe that we are going,’ was my reply.

‘Well, seeing is believing, surely, for here we are,’ he answered ; and, still holding his hand, we threaded our way amongst the carriages that were already blocking up the narrow street, and entered the building.

Of course, having lived so long in Fairport, he was well

known to all the people connected with the theatre ; and though some of them looked rather astonished at seeing him there, dressed so elaborately, every person was very kind ; and whilst one took charge of his hat and overcoat and umbrella, another relieved me of my cloak and bonnet, and a third led us along a narrow passage covered with red carpet, at the extreme end of which he unlocked a little door, and let us into a place close to the stage, hung all round with chintz, and furnished with four chairs, that had red velvet cushions and white enamelled backs.

If fairyland was ever presented to a child's eyes, fairyland opened before me at that moment. The light, the glitter, the beautifully-dressed ladies, the band, the scenery, appeared before me like some unreality produced by the wand of an enchanter.

Was I awake or dreaming ? Vainly my eyes looked round the house for an answer. I was stricken dumb and stupid with the sight, and stood like one bewildered, till my uncle, pulling me gently towards him, bade me sit down on one of the back chairs.

'For Mr and Mrs Bilbay will be here shortly,' he added. 'What do you think of it all, Nannie ?'

I could not answer. I could only stare at the place in which I found myself with a sort of transfixed wonder.

Experience, which teaches us so much we should be glad never to have learnt, has informed me since, that the Fairport theatre was dirty, shabby, small, and inconvenient ; but to my imagination that night it seemed like the palace of a king, or rather like one of those enchanted halls I had read of in Eastern stories—where thousands of lamps shine brightly, where gold and precious stones are strewed about as freely as pebbles on the seashore, where ladies are dressed in the height of magnificence, and the aspect of everything is different from that of our work-a-day world.

Suddenly my eyes perceived in a box on the opposite side some faces which were familiar to me. There, attired in rustling silks, with splendid shawls wrapped round them, with lace and ribbon softening, not concealing, their grey hair, sat the two Misses Wifforde ; and there too was Miss Cleeves, restless and

unblushing as ever, whilst behind stood Mr. Sylvester and some other gentleman with him.

Here was a nice state of things ! If Miss Wifforde knew we had presumed to come into such high and mighty company, might she not have something done to us ?

The terror of caste was very strong upon me as I whispered—

‘Do you know, uncle, the ladies from the Great House are here ?’

‘Well, dear, they will not eat you up, I suppose,’ he said, more in answer to my terrified expression than to my words ; but I doubt if even this fact would have put me at my ease, had not Mrs Bilbay appeared at the moment—an immense woman, who, good-naturedly insisting on my sitting in the front beside her, fairly enveloped me in the folds of her voluminous skirt.

Mrs Bilbay was a Londoner who cared as little for the traditions of local greatness as Miss Cleeves herself, and looked round the house through her opera-glass with a coolness which shocked while it inspired me with some degree of confidence.

As for Mr Bilbay, in comparison to his wife he appeared much about the same size as a shrimp might beside a large crayfish. Nevertheless it was rumoured he had the stronger will of the two, and successfully managed to get his own way, which was not a bad way either.

‘Do you think you shall enjoy it, little one ?’ she asked, after she had completed her survey of the house and exchanged remarks with her husband about some few of the audience.

‘Yes, ma’am,’ I replied, softly.

My heart was in my mouth with delight, and yet I could find no better answer.

‘Monday’s performance would have been the one for you to see,’ she went on ; ‘plenty of movement and spectacle. The music to-night will be lovely, but the plot is very quiet.’

Without in the least understanding what she meant, I answered that it would be beautiful to me, which seemed satisfactory to Mrs Bilbay ; for she smiled, and was proceeding to give me an outline of the opera, when her husband said, ‘Hush !’ and the first act commenced.

It had all been unreal enough before, but from that moment I was like one in a dream ; and as the opera proceeded, the fascination grew upon me till I forgot the spectators, my companions, and my own identity, in listening to such singing as it seemed to me could be like unto nothing except that of the angels in heaven.

Since those days I have heard almost every noted singer of the time. Many more famous than my particular star have trilled their lays and rehearsed their woes, but to me there can never be such another *prima donna* as Lucia Serlini.

Others might have more magnificent voices, others greater dramatic power, others more perfect and regular beauty ; but no one woman ever combined such expression, such grace, such refinement, as she who was the love of my youth.

I did not comprehend, of course, a word she sang. Mrs Bilbay had placed a book of the opera before me, but it lay on the front of the box unheeded till my uncle removed it for his own private instruction ; while I sat and listened spell-bound, quiet, yet with a vague yearning, an unsatisfied longing, in my heart, the cause of which I cannot clearly define even to this hour.

All at once there came a burst of applause louder and more persistent than any which had preceded it. *The song of the opera was ended, but I naturally was then ignorant of the fact.*

‘ Marvellous ! ’ exclaimed Mr Bilbay, clapping his hands with all his might.

‘ Simply perfection ! ’ said his wife.

‘ What did you think of that, Nannie ? ’ asked my uncle, leaning forward.

And still the storm of applause continued ; still the rain of bouquets fell at her feet ; still she curtseyed her acknowledgments, moving slowly backward all the time.

Then a tempest of noise arose. A hurricane of encores and bravos swept through the house. The audience clapped and stamped till I thought the place must come down.

‘ What does it all mean ? What do they want ? ’ I whispered to Mrs Bilbay.

'They want her to sing it again ; and see, she is going to do so.'

For a moment a greater tumult of applause than ever, more curtseying, more bouquets ; next instant a silence which might have been felt, and then, breaking the stillness, came that divine voice singing the first notes of 'Home, Sweet Home.'

I never heard anything like that woman's rendering of the melody—never in all my life. Already I was worked up to such a pitch of excitement that I could scarcely keep from crying ; and when, after the slow 'Home—home—sweet—sweet—home,' she broke forth, with a sort of passionate assertion, into the next line, 'There's no place like home,' ending with something which seemed an expression of melancholy regret for home lost for ever—'There's no—place—like home,' the tears I had hitherto restrained fell hot and fast on the cushions.

Just then she chanced to look towards our box—through a mist I could see her beautiful eyes resting on me for a second. It was only a momentary glance, but it recalled me to a consciousness of where I chanced to be ; and with a swift sense of shame, I wiped my eyes, and clasped my hands tightly together with a determination of not being foolish again.

And I did not shed another tear, and neither Mr nor Mrs Bilbay, nor yet my uncle, suspected what I had done until the opera was just finished, when the box-keeper presented Mr Bilbay with a twisted-up note written in pencil.

That gentleman read it twice over, and then, handing it to my uncle, remarked—

'The little lady is highly honoured.'

After which he passed it on to his wife, who, after perusal, gave the scrap of paper to me, saying at the same time—

'What in the world does that mean, child ?'

I read it, and in a moment rose up, dizzy and with my cheeks all aflame.

'Please do not be angry, uncle,' I entreated ; 'but I could not help crying, and the lady saw me—I know she did.'

Whereupon Mr Bilbay and Uncle Isaac exchanged smiles, while the former, patting my shoulder, said—

‘I dare say Madame Serlini is not offended with you past forgiveness. Summon up all your courage, and come with me. It will never do to keep her ladyship waiting.’

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

THAT night, as we walked home along the parade, and looked out over the moonlit sea, I do not think, in the length and breadth of Great Britain, to say nothing of Ireland and the Channel Islands, there could have been found so happy a little girl as myself.

The beautiful lady, so far from appearing angry, had asked, in her charming imperfect English, with a sweet foreign accent, if I loved music much, who I was, whence I came, if I had brother and sister, mother and father ; and when I told her I had neither brothers, sisters, mother, nor father, she gathered me to her heart in silence.

Then, after a moment’s pause, she asked if I should like to come again to the opera on Saturday.

‘Uncle Isaac would not be able to bring me, ma’am,’ I answered.

‘Your charming wife will take charge of the child—is it not so, dear sir?’ said the lady.

Whereupon Mr Bilbay promised faithfully that his charming wife would do so ; and we came away after Madame Serlini had touched my cheek with her lips, and said—

‘Adieu, dear child ; we shall meet again.’

All of which was duly recounted to my companion as we retraced our steps homeward.

‘It was better than going to Mrs Daniel’s, was it not, Nannie?’ said my uncle.

‘A thousand times over,’ I answered.

And then we were very unromantic, and sat down to supper, and discussed the whole opera from beginning to end.

‘I do not know much about music myself,’ said Uncle Isaacs; ‘but I should say that woman’s singing is worth all the money we hear she gets for it. Besides, one bad cold might spoil her voice for life; and of course she must put by for a rainy day.’

Put by! I listened to this idea with all deference then; but the time arrived when I understood the ludicrous absurdity of bracketing two such incongruous ideas as ‘saving’ and the beautiful *prima donna*.

‘You must get to bed now, Nannie,’ was my uncle’s remark, when he mixed himself a glass of punch, and filled the pipe he invariably smoked before retiring to rest. ‘You must get to bed, or else your aunt will find you with pale cheeks on her return, and scold us both.’

Prophetic words, although the scolding we received was not the result of any delicacy in my appearance.

For the first time almost in my remembrance of the household, there was a serious and angry dispute between husband and wife. My aunt, from some unexplained cause, did not return home in the sweetest of tempers. Something had evidently disturbed her equanimity and touched her vanity—never a difficult feat to perform; and when she heard that her husband had, as she straightforwardly worded her sentence, ‘been such a fool as to take a child who was uppish enough, and silly enough, and useless enough before, to hear an opera, and get her head stuffed full of ridiculous notions,’ she emptied the vials of her wrath on our devoted heads.

As for me, I was a ‘sly, underminded, hypocritical little brat, who would never come to any good, any more than my father had done before me—’

‘Remember the child’s father is dead,’ broke in my uncle, in a tone I had never heard him use previously.

‘The more reason she should be grateful to those who have been mother and father both to her,’ rejoined my aunt. ‘No, Isaac; if you are an idiot and bewitched by your niece, I am no idiot, and she cannot delude me. I will have no such

sneaking ways in my house. Stuck up in a box at the opera, indeed, like any lady, and kissed by play-actors afterwards! How do you suppose this will fit her for the sort of life you know she must lead? You would not catch any of your own children crying like babies, and putting themselves forward out of doors. No; she is getting too old to be gadding about visiting; and so I shall tell her grandmother. And you thought you would be allowed to go again to-morrow night, did you, miss? By that time you shall be safe at home in Lovedale. I will have no such goings-on in this house so long as I am mistress of it.'

'There, Nannie, you have been scolded long enough,' broke in my uncle at this juncture. 'Run away, and put your things together, and you shall go back by the coach this afternoon. Your aunt is right: there shall be no apple of discord in any house I am master of.'

His eyes were very bright, and his colour very high, and his tone almost mocking as he spoke; and I obeyed his commands, understanding intuitively that he had ranged himself on my side, and that there was going to be a dreadful quarrel.

And a dreadful quarrel they had—so Jemima, who listened outside the door, informed me, while I sat sick and faint on the side of my bed, hurt as I had never been hurt before, wounded beyond possibility of cure—thus it seemed to me then—pained to an agony which could not even find expression in tears.

I had been so happy, and I was so wretched. From a seventh heaven of bliss I had been cast down into depths which my soul had never previously fathomed. Most innocently I had caused discord between my uncle and aunt. His very kindness to me was now occasioning him trouble. And still the war went on, till I heard the drawing-room door close with a bang, and my uncle descend the stairs with a haste foreign to his nature.

'Shall I help you to pack up your things?' said Jemima, who, perhaps remembering the brooch, was anxious that my exit should take place before, with mind at ease, I was in a position to expose the fraud practised by her.

'Please,' was all I could say; but I could not help watching

her while she packed, and noticing that anything of value was left in the drawers, a perquisite for the girl who elected to be my assistant.

From a social position higher than her own I write these lines, and therefore I am quite sure that when she proffered her assistance Jemima's character was that of an embryo lady's-maid, minus the qualities which render a lady's-maid a desirable inmate of a family.

After a time, regardless of trifles, I abandoned my former attitude, and leaving Jemima to appropriate as much as she liked, crept down to my uncle.

'I am going home with you, dear,' he said. 'I want to see my mother.' And accordingly we went home to Lovedale together.

Since that time I have ascertained the ticket intended to admit me and a friend was appropriated by my aunt, who, with Jemima, went to the opera and beheld *Eurydice*.

Eurydice! With my present knowledge of that opera there is to me a wonderful satire in the idea of Mrs Isaac going to see it at all—she to whom anything but the most unromantic of lower middle-class *convenances* were as Eleusinian mysteries.

Eurydice, with its passion, and its pathos, and its power! what meaning on earth should it convey to a woman whose sole aim in existence it was ultimately to possess a better-furnished drawing-room than Mrs Daniel, and to see her sons and daughters mated to the daughters and sons of prosperous tradesmen?

All right and proper without question, and above everything, human, but nevertheless so totally prosaic an existence, that it repelled my imagination utterly when I attempted to enter its precincts.

They would have none of me, and for the future I could have none of them; wherefore I returned to Lovedale, to my old life and my old pursuits, bringing back with me to each and all a vague unrest remarkable in one so young.

My sudden return occasioned much grief to the dear grandmother; and but for Uncle Isaac's kindness in accompanying me home, and explaining the circumstances under which I had,

so to speak, been expelled in disgrace, I scarcely know how I should have satisfied her of my total innocence of evil in the matter. As it was, she rebuked her son for taking me to such an improper place as a theatre ; she said she thought Jane was quite right in insisting on my immediate departure.

‘ You know well,’ she went on, ‘ that the child is unlike other children, and has strange-enough ways and notions, without having any more put into her head.’

‘ With all due deference to you, mother,’ was the reply, ‘ I do not believe you will change Nannie’s ways and notions unless you can have her re-created. As Mr Bilbay said to me last night, she has the true artist nature ; and although I fear that nature may not add to her happiness hereafter, still I am certain it would be wise to recognize its existence and treat her accordingly. For some inscrutable reason the Almighty does not make everybody alike, and it seems to me very like waste of time to attempt to change His designs. Here is Nannie, brought up entirely by you, as different from any one of your children, her mother not excepted, as a bluebell is from a thistle. She is a dear good little girl, grateful for very small kindnesses, whom I had not thought much about, or in the slightest degree understood, till yesterday. But I think I do understand her now ; at any rate I know that whilst I live she shall never want a friend.’

I could not bear it any longer ; I crept quietly out of the room where mother and son sat together in the twilight, and went into the garden, and down to the end of the paddock, where I could hear the murmur of the Love as it flowed over the stones far below. There after a time my uncle joined me.

‘ Nannie,’ he began, ‘ I did not know you had come back into the room when I was talking to your grandmother, or I should not have spoken as I did. As you did hear what I said, however, I want you to do something for me.’

‘ What is it ?’ I asked eagerly,—‘ what is it ? I will do anything on earth for you.’

‘ I want you to prove me a true prophet. I want you to be a good girl, who shall comfort your grandmother for all the sorrow your poor mother caused her. I will tell you the story of

your mother's marriage, Nannie, and you must never forget the misery it caused.'

There, in the twilight, with the moon struggling to climb up high enough to look over the dark belt of fir-trees that skirted the eastern side of the Wifforde domain, I first heard that tale repeated right through, from beginning to end. My uncle did not speak harshly of either of my parents ; he only pointed out the suffering and the regret his sister had brought upon herself and her family by her disobedience ; and he prayed of me beyond all things to keep truthful, to avoid concealment even in the most trivial matters, to be honest and thorough.

' And if you will only promise me this, and try with all your heart and soul and strength to keep it, I shall not be afraid, even with your nature, to see you start on your journey through life, which you may have to perform alone some day—though not while I live, please God.'

' I will try to be good, uncle,' I answered. ' I have tried ; but I will try harder now, for poor grannie's sake and yours.'

He took my hand and shook it, just as if I had been a man ; and then we went back into the house together, and found my grandmother looking all the happier for that long talk with her first-born.

He stayed with us until the Monday morning, and we amused ourselves with long walks about the country—by nutting and gathering blackberries, and by visits to people he had known in his younger days.

Never, in my recollection, had one of my grandmother's sons paid her so lengthened a visit ; and the dear soul was quite gratified at having a male creature to fuss over.

Marvellous were the culinary delicacies she prepared for his delectation. Wonderful was it to behold the thought she took for his comfort, and the means she devised to insure it. Sometimes my uncle would say to her—

' Mother, if I came here often, you would completely spoil me.'

' My children have never given me a chance of spoiling them,' she answered on one occasion ; and there was a slight tremor

in her voice as she spoke, the meaning of which I did not understand then, though I comprehend now that there are times in a woman's life when it does seem a trial to have reared sons and daughters only in order to give them over to the daughters and sons of other people, whose interests shall be their interests, whose hopes shall be their hopes, and who shall hold such possession of them, that in due time the old home becomes but a vague memory.

'Be very good to my mother, Nannie,' were the last words he said to me ; and then she and I, hand clasped in hand, went back from the little gate—whence he had watched his retreating figure till it disappeared in the distance—to the seam, and the knitting, and the stocking-mending, and the long-ago stories that had made up the tale of our usual existence, the not unpleasing monotony of which I have tried, scarcely so successfully as might be desired, to describe.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS CLEEVES.

SKIRTING the Wifforde estate, that river from which our valley derived its name flowed sometimes quietly, sometimes noisily, on its way to the sea.

When the winter rains fell, and the drifting snow lay thick upon the green fields around Lovedale, then the Love dashed over stones and boulders, a very giant in its might ; and again, when the ice under which it had perforce kept within bounds was melted in the early spring—then once more the waters had dominion over the earth, flooding the fields, undermining the banks, uprooting the sheltering trees, bearing huge rocks along in its progress.

In its strength the Love was a very lion, but in its gentleness it could be a lamb.

To hear its listless ripple in the summer-time, it was impossible to realize the roar and din of its December career.

Late on into the autumn it sometimes sang its low-voiced melody, and there was no time in the year that I loved its tones better than when, beneath orange and red foliage, daintily tripping its way around rock and stone, just covering the gravel and the sand, touching with a caressing hand ferns, brambles, and grasses, it dreamed its life away just as I was dreaming mine.

Dear river ! I close my eyes, and in imagination I hear your ripple and lament, still the same as I heard it one autumn morning long ago, when I sat perched on a great stone in the middle of your stream, singing to your accompaniment.

Have I said the early morning was the perfectly free part of my life ? If not, let me say so now. We were awake with the first streak of day, we breakfasted at unheard-of hours. After breakfast my grandmother, unlike Desdemona in all other respects, was, like her, on household cares intent, and only too glad for me to find some employment or amusement that should ease her of my unprofitable presence.

During that period I was ' somewhere '—all she then cared to know ; in the garden, by the beehives, dusting the nicknacks, perhaps strumming the spinet. Latterly, however, I was a long way from home ; singing where no one could hear me—singing to the birds, and the trees, and the murmuring river songs that mine own soul alone had thorough cognisance of.

We lose all this as we grow older. Men forget the mad passion with which they wooed Joan, and Joan on her side has only a faint memory of the throb her heart gave when she heard the gate latch lifted to give ingress to her lover. Artistes sing for so many guineas a roulade ; artists paint for so many hundred pounds a face—perhaps *the* face—for such a number of guineas a landscape—perchance *the* landscape—with which a thousand enchanting or heartbreaking memories are connected.

Life seems to me so odd a thing divested of its romance, as mistakenly all of us try sooner or later to depict it, that in despair—looking at the whole scheme as that scheme is sometimes :

represented to me in the pages of books and the axioms of those with whom I come in contact—I must lay down my pen for a moment ere I can make the boulders and the stones, the overhanging trees, and the ferns and grasses of that wandering Love, mine again—once more.

There, it belongs to me, that past. It is the early morning of a day in autumn ; and I, having followed the bend of the stream from that deep defile far below our cottage, where it flowed on swifter and darker towards the sea, up to the higher ground, found myself at length in a spot which always delighted my soul, filling it with a rapture and a peace that were none the less real because I never could understand the source whence they sprang.

It is the early morning, and the sun shines brightly. I sit down on a boulder in the middle of the stream, and look around on the beautiful earth. To my right are pleasant fields, sloping gently away to the valley below ; to my left lies the gable of the Great House, seen imperfectly, by reason of intervening plantations. Against the bright blue sky the fir-trees stand out darker and more gloomy than ever. At my feet there is a pool of clear water, so clear and bright that I can see the gravel and sand at the bottom. Amongst the stones the river—by reason of long drought little more now than a trickling rivulet—wanders in and out, singing low songs to its own murmuring accompaniment. Under the alder-trees—mere bushes at this point—I can see the speckled trout darting hither and thither. The leaves of the trees are all yellow and gold, and scarlet and crimson ; the low banks are clothed with brambles and ferns, with hawthorn-trees on which the berries are turning red ; whilst on the mountain ash, or Rowan, as we called it, the rich clusters are already scarlet.

A glorious morning, with a certain crispness in the air, invigorating as the first breath of early spring ; a morning when the autumn, having donned her best apparel, seeks to persuade one her mature beauty is greater than the timid loveliness of May, or the rich glory of August ; seeks, and for the moment succeeds in her endeavour.

Basking in the sunshine, with eyes wandering hither and thither, I, at all events, am happy. Queen of all I survey, why should I not be so? For me the murmuring river, with never an uneasy thought as to poachers or rights of water; for me the distant church-spire, with no tithe to pay; for me the soft beauty of green fields sloping tenderly, with no rent to find; for me tangled brier and brilliant berry, without ever a halfpenny of wages to disburse; for me the dark plantations, and never a forester or gamekeeper to employ; for me the enjoyment of God's loveliest places, without rates, taxes, servants, appearance, to pay for.

Ought I not to be happy? Yea, truly; spite of my Fairport memories, or perchance because of them, I am happy.

Thirty miles stretch between me and Mrs Isaac Motfield. Seated in the middle of the Love, she has no dominion over me.

If that beautiful lady came and talked to me now, Mrs Isaac need never know anything about our interview. But then the lady was not in the least degree likely to come; and as I thought of that—thought vaguely that for the future the course of my life was settled, that I should never go to Fairport again, never behold any more the grand company I had once seen assembled within the walls of the Theatre Royal, never hear such singing more—my heart, spite of the crisp air and the bright sunshine, and the free wide landscape, died away in a sort of stupid faint.

Just then a thrush, perched on the dead branch of a willow close at hand, began to sing, quietly at first; but warming no doubt with his theme, unintelligible as the story might be to me, he burst forth ultimately into such a chaos of song, that when he ceased, I could not choose but follow him and *her*.

On his branch he sat and looked at me; from my rock I sang and looked at him; sang inspired by him and *her*, by the breath of the early morning, by memory, by youth, by solitude and beauty.

It was *her* song I sang. I had known it before, but re-learnt it from her teaching. Could I ever forget how she sang it? Never. As I write she comes forward to the footlights, and in her sweet foreign accents trills out that English ballad.

‘Home, home,’ I sang, imitating all unconsciously her expression and intonation, ‘sweet, sweet home’—the thrush turned his brown head on one side and looked at me intently, but uttered never a note—

‘There’s no place like home,
There’s no—place like home !’

‘Brava !’ cried some one behind me at this juncture—‘brava ! encore ! Don’t in your excitement pitch yourself off that lofty peak. *Soyez tranquille* ; I am coming to you as fast as it is possible, considering Nature has denied me the use of wings.’

Yes, there she came, Miss Cleeves, attired in dazzling white, wearing a most remarkable sun-bonnet, picking her way over the stones to me—Annie !

‘I say, little girl,’ she went on, ‘where did you get that voice ? Good Heavens, were I only the possessor of such a voice ! You must have heard Madame Serlini. Oh, I remember now. You were the child in the stage-box who cried, as well you might, as I should have done had I dared. Sit down this moment, and sing that song for me again.’

Here was a fix ; I dared not refuse, and I could not obey. I essayed to do so in a sort of abject terror ; but the words died away on my lips, and the tones of my voice were so low and subdued that the thrush, taking courage from my cowardice, broke forth into a triumphant carol at the end of my fourth line.

‘There, you are a stupid !’ exclaimed Miss Cleeves, as I broke down ignominiously. ‘I do hate shy people ; they are such idiots.’ And sitting opposite to me, with her feet dangling over the pool, and her hands supporting her chin, she surveyed me at her leisure.

‘Little girl,’ she said at length, breaking a silence which appeared to me awful, ‘do you know who I am ?’

‘Yes, miss,’ I answered.

‘Don’t say “miss,” like a charity-child ; now, who am I ?’

‘Miss Elizabeth Cleeves.’

'Quite right. And how do you know I am Miss Elizabeth Cleeves?'

She hurt my pride so much by mimicking my voice and manner, that taking courage I replied boldly enough—

'I have known you by sight for years. I first saw you standing on the balcony of Miss Wifforde's house at Fairport.'

'So you have found your tongue,' she remarked; 'that is better. And now you will perhaps be kind enough to tell me who you are, and how it happens that I find you twenty miles from Fairport, sitting on a flat rock in the middle of the Love?'

'I live at Lovedale,' was my answer; 'in that small white cottage down yonder.'

'Then how came you to see me at Fairport?'

'I was staying there with my uncle.'

'And who took you to the opera?'

'Uncle Isaac. Mr Bilbay gave him two tickets.'

'What is your name?'

'Annie Trenet, miss.'

'I told you before not to call me miss. If you do it again I shall box your ears. What is your father?'

'I have not a father.'

'What was he when you had one?'

'He painted pictures.'

'What sort of pictures?'

'Like that; and I pointed vaguely to the hills and the trees and the rippling river.

'Oh, landscapes. Who was your mother?'

'Daughter of old Farmer Motfield. The Misses Wifforde bought his land when he died.'

'Is your mother living? Why, child,' she went on, as I shook my head, 'your talk is a perfect obituary. It is like walking through a graveyard, and reading "Sacred to the memory" at every step. If every one belonging to you is dead, who takes charge of you in that small white cottage down yonder?'

She was mimicking me again; but I did not care for it so much now. There was something in the mere fact of sitting on

the same piece of rock, and talking on equal terms with a relative of the Wiffordes, which filled me with so terrible an astonishment, that minor matters seemed to fade away from view.

‘I live with my grandmother,’ I answered.

‘And who taught you to sing?’

‘No one; and I cannot sing.’

‘Cannot sing!’ repeated Miss Cleeves. ‘Ye stones, listen to that. If I could sing like that, little girl, I would do something. I don’t know, indeed, what I would not do;’ and she rose, and with arms folded across her bosom, looked solemnly down the stream as she made this assertion.

While she stood there a natural idea, suggested probably by her dress and general appearance, occurred to me.

‘Miss Cleeves,’ I ventured, ‘do you think you ought to stay talking to me here? If the Misses Wifforde knew of it, they might not be pleased.’

‘Why not, child?’

She asked this moodily from under the shelter of her sunbonnet.

‘Because—because’—and the words almost stifled me, though I was determined to say them—‘I am not a lady like you.’

Then she turned and looked at me, took my measure from head to foot, from foot to head back again.

‘Little girl,’ she said, ‘though you can sing as I never thought a child of your age could, you have a great deal to learn. Genius has made you a lady. Do you understand me?’

‘No,’ I answered; albeit dimly I think I comprehended what that remarkable young person meant.

‘Genius has its own rank,’ she went on. ‘I shall come and see you. Good-bye; won’t you shake hands?’

I felt timid about availing myself of her proffered courtesy.

‘I wonder what will be the end of us both some day!’ she said.

O my soul, in the watches of the night I have often repeated that cry!

In the stillness her voice falls once more upon my ear; spite of the darkness that scene rises out of the past, and spreads itself

before me in all the glory of an autumn morning, across which lay the glamour of my own young fancy.

Again the sun tips the many-coloured leaves with gold, again I behold the soft green fields sloping off gently towards Lovedale ; there is our tiny cottage ; at my feet ripples the Love. I stand alone on the boulder, while with light and rapid movement Miss Cleeves picks her way across the stream, and reaches the bank, and after one wave of her hand trips off in the direction of the Great House ; and then I begin to pursue my own way down the stream, wondering in what words I shall tell my grandmother of that marvellous adventure.

CHAPTER IX.

I SING.

WHEN two persons who, so far as temperament is concerned, have not much in common live an utterly secluded existence, such, for example, as was led by us dwellers in the small white cottage, it is astonishing the difficulty that may be experienced by one at least of the twain in communicating the occurrence which has happened out of the beaten track of every-day routine.

Along the monotonous road we trod anything in the shape of news was like some rare and beautiful flower springing beside our path ; and yet, like a selfish little wretch, I should have preferred keeping the rare exotic, whose acquaintance I had made in the middle of the Love, for my own personal delectation. Besides, how would my grandmother receive the intelligence ? How might I ever tell her that actually within sight of the Great House I had been indulging myself with a private concert, and singing 'Home, Sweet Home,' to the expressed satisfaction of Miss Elizabeth Cleeves ?

That she would be shocked at my 'boldness,' I was well

aware ; that she would forbid me the Love and solitary rambles, I fully expected ; that she would desire me for the future to 'mind my seam,' and leave singing to ladies and play-actors, were things of course. Nevertheless, I felt it incumbent upon me to divulge the secret ; and after weary hours of waiting and consideration and hesitation, my opportunity came.

It was after tea ; household duties were ended for the day. In the cowshed Cowslip was chewing the cud with luxurious industry ; in the stable Tom had finished his oats and chaff, and was thinking of settling down for the night ; long before the pigs had nestled underneath the straw, and now lay, snouts extended, snoring in ecstatic comfort ; the hens, led by a patriarchal cock, had retired to roost some hours previously ; and the ducks I had seen waddling up from their accustomed pond, while there was still light enough to show the green paddock, and the white procession defiling homewards to the music of an occasional 'quack.'

Within the house everything was almost as still as in the farm-yard. Another Jack and another Jill made love in the kitchen, where previous vows had resulted in matrimony ; in the parlour my grandmother sat, knitting stockings intended for the use of one of her progeny ; while I silently stitched away at a wristband, destined in good time to walk about Fairport, attached to one of Uncle Isaac's snowy shirts.

There had been a long pause, broken only by the click of her needles, and the noise I made in drawing my thread in and out. I was considering how I should commence my story, and my companion evidently, after the manner of some elderly persons, represented my silence.

'Why are you so dull and quiet to-night ?' she inquired.

'I was thinking, grannie,' I replied.

'That is a very bad habit for you to fall into. You should break yourself of it.'

'I will try, grannie,' was my meek answer.

'And what were you thinking about ?' she next inquired.

'About Miss Elizabeth Cleeves,' I said, taking courage. 'I met her this morning when I was out.'

' Well, there is nothing wonderful to think of in that. You have seen her many a time before. How was she dressed ? Was she riding with Mr Sylvester, or in the carriage with her aunts ? '

' She was neither, grannie. She was standing on a big stone in the Love talking to me.'

Notwithstanding my dread of consequences, I could not help feeling a little triumph in noticing the effect produced by this statement.

Here was news with a vengeance ; here was food for reflection and comment ; here was ' Startling Intelligence,' inserted in our domestic newspaper ; and all by me.

' Talking to you ! ' repeated my grandmother ; ' what in the world could Miss Elizabeth find to say to you ? '

To the speaker, it was evident she looked upon the announcement made so suddenly as she might at an assertion that I had met Queen Victoria taking a morning stroll through Lovedale, and been honoured by an interview.

' She asked me a great many questions,' was my reply, ' about my father and mother, and where I lived, and who took care of me, and how I happened to go to the opera at Fairport—she saw me there ; I think she sees everything—and who taught me to sing. And then, when I told her I could not sing, she laughed and said she wished she had a voice like mine. She is such a strange young lady, grannie. She called me " little girl," and forbade my saying " Miss ; " and when I asked if she did not think the Misses Wifforde would be angry if they knew she was there talking to me, she laughed again, and said she meant to come here ; and, oh, grannie, don't be angry about it, for I was afraid to say her nay.'

I looked up in my grandmother's face, frightened by the unbroken silence she had maintained during this long sentence, and beheld there an expression I shall never forget.

It was as though she were bearing the trouble of her life over again. After my own fashion, with that sort of sympathy which a dumb animal can afford to its master, I vaguely understood that the drama of my mother's flight, the tragedy of that short career, was being enacted on the stage of her heart once more.

‘Grannie, grannie !’ I cried in my terror, ‘ don’t look like that ! Forgive me, and I will try never to sing again. I promised Uncle Isaac I would be good to you and everybody, and I will if I can, grannie.’

We were locked in each other’s arms by this time, and she strained me to her heart, as if she felt there was safety for me nowhere else in the world.

Then I heard her murmur—

‘ I see now my son was right. It pleases God to make those even of a family different one from another. May He guide me and this child ! ’

And all the while I, feeling there was something terrible in so strange a prayer, clung closer to her, and cried aloud—

‘ Please, grannie, don’t. Oh, grannie, don’t, please ! ’

But as if she had not heard, she said, putting me back into my chair—

‘ Annie, there is one thing I hope you are not—I am sure you are not—and that is, deceitful to your old grandmother.’

‘ I am sure I would not deceive anybody, if I knew it,’ I answered boldly, my indignation checking the coming tears ; for I knew what it had cost me to be frank with her, and this was the result.

‘ Then tell me, word for word, if you can remember, what passed between you and Miss Cleeves.’

Her tone was so gentle, it disarmed me instantly. Yes, something underlay her anxiety I could not understand then, that I never did fully comprehend till I had children of my own ; and so I began my narrative. No need to say ‘ if I could remember.’ In lives like ours, the few incidents they contained were all we had to remember. How, therefore, was it possible for me to forget ?

I told her all about it ; how in the beautiful morning, in the middle of the river, all alone, as I thought, I was ‘singing my song ; and so forth.

There was no enthusiasm in my narrative. Perhaps it produced all the more effect for that very reason. When I finished, I knew intuitively I had made my mark.

One from the Great House, young though she was, flighty though she might be, had praised and recognized the poor ability I possessed ; and every one who has learned the lesson of life from out the book of his own bitter experience cannot fail to understand that where there is any real ability, those of a man's household are the last to recognize the fact. For them uncrowned genius has no prospective monarchy. In their eyes the familiar locks would seem unreal burdened by the phantom laurel-wreath to come. It is always the unreal, the speculative, the self-asserting, that carries domestic conviction of its false presence with it ; and so the actual genius lies dormant till some stranger, crossing the threshold, lays his hand upon it, or till genius, having crossed its own threshold, finds in the stirring world that recognition which was denied on the parental hearth.

Yes, at length, vaguely, sorrowfully, my grandmother understood I was a duckling who must, sooner or later steal away from the cottage and the familiar existence to the great lake of life.

To that my instincts tended. I was, after my fashion, artistic. I had a voice. Miss Cleeves said so, and the words were solemn to my grandmother as though spoken by an oracle.

I had a voice. Until that hour she never recognized the possibility of such a stupendous fact. The chicken she had reared, in fact, proved not a chicken at all, but a strange creature who could gyrate in unfamiliar waters, and talk without much embarrassment to Miss Cleeves herself.

‘What did you say you sang to the young lady?’ my grandmother at length inquired.

‘I did not sing anything to her,’ I answered. ‘She asked me to do so, but I felt shy and broke down. What she heard me singing was Madame Serlini’s ballad, “Home, Sweet Home.”’

‘I know the song,’ she remarked ; ‘but I should like to hear it from you. Sing it for me.’

At these words I arose, and going into the darkest corner of the apartment, thrice essayed to commence—vainly.

Then, in a sort of desperation, I closed my eyes. I reproduced the crowded theatre, the footlights, the beautiful lady ;

and just as if I were in my small way a *prima donna* in our atom of a room, I began 'Home, Sweet Home.'

I sang it with the whole of my little soul in the work. I sang it as though pit, gallery, boxes, and stalls were hanging on my words in rapt attention.

I ended, and there was a dead silence. I opened my eyes, and from my corner looked towards the figure seated beside the round table, lighted by a solitary candle.

Her elbows rested on the table, her head supported by her hands.

I cannot tell what she was thinking of. Altogether I know it seemed more than I could bear.

Out of the room, up the few steep stairs into my small chamber, I crept silently to bed.

Long after my best friend thought I was sound asleep, I heard her praying audibly by my side, 'Lord, keep this child from evil;' but I could not tell her I still lay wide awake, both because I thought she might not like to know I was listening, and also because I felt that if I spoke, my own heart must burst.

CHAPTER X.

OUR VISITOR.

IT would be impossible for me to mark with either black or white pebbles the Sundays of that far-away time. But for the bees and the garden, the occasional lamb, the calf just weaned, the newly-hatched clutch of chickens, the budding leaves of spring, the perfumes of summer, the rich mellow hues of autumn, and the snows and icicles of winter, Sunday would, I fear, in our humble home at Lovedale, have proved a dreary holy time to me. .

As it was, there comes wafted to me from those Sabbath

childhood a sense of peace, of happiness, and repose. Through the great silence which always seemed to follow the stir and bustle of morning service, there break upon my ear the lazy murmur of honey-laden bees, the ripple of the Love, the soft bleating of sheep, the prating of our favourite pullets, the plaintive chirrup of a stray chicken.

And if my thoughts would sometimes soar off to Fairport and Fairport doings on Sundays, they always ended their flight in St Stephen's Church, and resting with folded wings under the tablet aforementioned, sat listening with a trembling delight to the pealing organ, and the voices of men and women singing triumphant praises to the Lord on high.

There was no organ at Lovedale, either in the church—whither the Misses Wifforde drove in great state and ceremony—or in the chapel, where we repaired on foot with no ceremony at all, unless indeed our best clothes, which were donned only once a week, could be considered robes of state; and the six Psalm tunes that constituted our repertory utterly failed to satisfy the musical requirements of one now so critical as Annie Trenet, who had not only frequently stolen into St Stephen's on Saturday evenings to listen to private rehearsals of the chants intended to delight next day a Fairport congregation, but had actually heard Madame Serlini sing, and been spoken to by her afterwards.

There are, I imagine, some children to whom, long before they can understand the meaning and value of forms and ceremonies, the service of the Church seems a more grateful form of worship than the colder service favoured by Dissent. It was so with me, at all events. The bare white walls, the square staring windows, the stained-deal pulpit, and plain whitewashed ceiling, contrasted unfavourably with the softened light, the painted glass, the arched roof, the old monuments that delighted my heart in St Stephen's.

In our chapel there were no monuments; there was only one hideous tablet, which exactly resembled a sheet of mourning note-paper. A rim of black marble edged a white slab, whereon was set forth this statement:—

Erected in Memory of
JOSHUA SANDELLS, ESQUIRE,
Formerly of this Parish,
And Founder of this Chapel.

He was an affectionate husband, a tender parent, a faithful friend, and a sound Christian.

He passed to his eternal rest on the 1st day of June, 1829, at his residence, Fairport House, near Fairport.

This tablet is presented to Ebenezer Chapel by his Widow, who mourns not as those who have no hope.

‘He being dead, yet speaketh.’

The service was as bald as the building: extempore prayers of an interminable length; hymns consisting of about a dozen verses, sung in unison by the whole congregation (myself excepted), principally through their noses; two chapters of the Bible, one selected from the Old and another from the New Testament, both of which our minister considered it incumbent upon him to expound; and a sermon—shall I ever forget those sermons, with their ‘thirdly,’ ‘lastly,’ ‘finally,’ and ‘in conclusion’?—that was the religious bill of fare presented to us Sunday after Sunday in Lovedale.

But yet it was a form of diet which the inhabitants seemed to like better than that offered in the little church hard by. The church counted its worshippers by tens, we by fifties. Living, the Lovedale people did not affect its preeinets; dead, they dotted its graveyard. Under a green mound slept my grandfather and his fathers before him.

Two headstones placed side by side marked the last home of Motfields almost without number; and often on Sundays, indeed generally, when we came out of our Bethel, our steps wandered naturally into that quiet churchyard, where we were wont to stand silent beside one especial spot, whilst the sun-beams flitted in and out, playing at hide-and-seek amongst the graves.

When we got home again, we dined, and then our servant donned her best apparel, and went to afternoon service.

Regularly when the door banged after her, my grandmother was wont to place an immense family Bible on a little table

drawn close up to the window, and she read the large print till she fell asleep ; whilst I amused myself with the few books our shelves boasted that could be considered proper reading for Sunday.

How vividly I remember those well-thumbed volumes, in which, on the merest threads of a story, pearls of religious instruction were strung ! *Mary and her Mamma* was the title of one of them ; and if Mary only got one half so tired of her parent as I did, she must indeed have been delighted at the prospect of entering woman's estate. I liked some accounts of missionary work the best. In those books there was at all events some variety, some movement, some change of scene and people ; but in *Mary*, when the mamma said, 'I intend to walk across to Moor Edge, and call upon kind Mrs Dorcas ; would my little daughter like to accompany me ?' I always knew a sermon was impending. There was a deliberate deceitfulness in those books which filled me with a profound despair.

It was like never having any jam that had not a pill or a powder lurking amid the sweetness. What a relief it used to be when my grandmother's eyes were fairly closed, and the large spectacles covered shut lids !

Noiselessly at that juncture I was wont to leave the apartment, and seek amusement, if it were fine, out of doors ; if it were wet, in turning over my few quasi-possessions in the tiny room appropriated to my use.

Later on, when Hannah returned, we had tea ; and after tea I read aloud the *Pilgrim's Progress*, or that other progress of Christian's wife, which always seemed to me more charming than his own. Real to my imagination were the Slough of Despond, the path beset with dangers, the key which gave liberty to the captives in Doubting Castle, the wicked city where Faithful was put to death, the arbour where Christian lost his roll, the river broad and deep, and the city higher than the clouds, which, like Bunyan, I wished to enter, that I too might behold the streets paved with gold, and the men with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps, to sing praises withal, that walked therein.

I did not in the least comprehend in those days the true meaning of the tale. It seemed to me a real account of travels undertaken by real men, women, and children, who after passing through great dangers, enduring much trouble, surmounting many obstacles, entered at last into a sort of fairyland such as was depicted in the story-books I at that time loved.

It is well, perhaps, to read Bunyan after this fashion when a child, since it invests religion with a certain 'glamour,' if the word be not profane, that it is impossible to throw over the subject at a later period.

For example, although my grandmother looked upon Bunyan's *Pilgrim* with a sort of devout awe only second to that with which she regarded the Holy Scriptures, nevertheless she went to sleep over the narration I regarded as so full of interest. To her the *Progress* was merely a good book ; to me it was a story full of incident and excitement—a story so full, indeed, that I should frequently have indulged myself with a private perusal, had not such a liberty been tacitly forbidden by the fact of the volume being kept on the topmost shelf of a very inaccessible cupboard.

By some accident the *Pilgrim* had become possessed of a very handsome binding ; and when we brought him down on Sundays, we were careful to keep the grey linen in which his morocco binding was swathed close round the book, lest a chance touch should damage the outer garment, that my grandmother considered as second only in importance to that in which he was clothed in a better world at the end of his journey.

Worn and frayed is that binding now ; the leather has lost the glory of its first youth, the gilding is tarnished, the pages are discoloured ; but the story the text tells is dear to me as it was when I sat in our little parlour and read that ever-new tale aloud.

An uneventful life to chronicle, an existence almost devoid of incident, and yet perhaps for that reason the few events that occurred seemed very remarkable and very grateful to our monotonous experience.

Our mental appetites had never been surfeited with a perpetual feast of exciting surprises. To us the daily gossip, the

latest scandal, the visits, the letters, and the news of ordinary society were as foreign as rich soups, made dishes, curious puddings, and French confectionery on our dinner-table ; and accordingly, when a *bonne bouche* did come in our way, we made the most of it. We turned an incident, as the old dissenting minister is reported to have turned Ephraim, inside out, upside down, round and about ; but it was generally a long period before we followed the preacher's final example, and turned our subject, as he did Ephraim, about his business.

My short youth is a wonderful period now to look back upon. Counted by years, I know it was brief indeed ; and yet to my memory that time of sweet repose, of dreamy idleness, of happy innocence, lengthens itself out to a century at least. What is twelve months of life, when life begins to seem precious to us—a thing desirable to have and to hold.

The days from Christmas to Christmas I feel now able to clasp in my hand. Spring is but a whiff of hawthorn-blossoms passed under my nostrils, and then fading away to make room for the roses of summer. And what are they to me ? In comparison to the rose-days of my childhood, they seem but a momentary blaze of beauty.

What are the fruits of autumn—the gorgeous tints with which she paints each leaf and berry ? Alas, alas ! when we have sat at Nature's table month after month and year after year, one cannot bring to the feast that keen enjoyment which gave such a relish to existence when all the world was young, when others took all the care and trouble and anxiety on their shoulders, and worldly sorrows were as unknown to the little ones as worldly hopes.

So far my life had been tranquil as the quiet beauty of Lovedale ; but a change—not a sharp or painful change, albeit it was unexpected—chanced to be close at hand.

How well I remember each trifling detail of that Sunday afternoon when it came ! We were sitting, after our usual fashion, in a little room that commanded a view of the Great House. Close drawn up to the window were chair and table for my grandmother's special benefit. The hearth was swept clean ;

for although the sun shone brightly out of doors, still within, the weather was chilly, and a fire acceptable. On a footstool beside the old-fashioned brass fender, which it almost scorched my hand to touch, I sat reading, longing all the while to be out under the golden-pippin tree, where I was well aware there were plenty of apples to be had for the trouble of picking them from the ground.

But my grandmother kept obstinately awake; and her prejudices were against wandering about the garden and eating fruit in the open air on Sundays. So, forced to bide my time, I remained quiet.

Once more I look round that silent room. There is the old harpsichord; above it hangs my mother's portrait. Large oil paintings by my father ornament the walls. There are dark oaken chairs, with quaint backs, and ornamented with much carving. There are shells from foreign shores; there are feather fans made by Indians; ivory trifles, brought no doubt by some sailor relative from China.

The history of those nicknacks—so alien to the modes and habits of the Motfields—which came from the cottage where my father died, I shall never know. For me they had always a singular fascination, and on that special afternoon, wearied of reading, I turned and contemplated with a new interest the curious but by no means valuable contents of our room.

How long I had sat there, weaving fantastic histories out of shells, fans, and pagodas, I cannot tell, when my grandmother's voice roused me from my dream.

'Annie, Annie, make haste!' she exclaimed, speaking quickly and suddenly. 'Who is this coming here? Lor' o' mercy, girl, it is Miss Cleeves! Whatever can she want?'

As to what Miss Cleeves might or might not want, that young lady left me no time to speculate; for even before my grandmother had finished speaking, a prolonged knock echoed through our tiny house—a knock sufficient, so it seemed to me, who had never heard the like before, to bring the small tenement about our ears.

‘Shall I go to the door?’ I asked, turning cold and hot in the same second.

‘Of course. We must not keep the young lady waiting.’

And it was as well we did not; for before I could reach the door, she had her hand on the knocker again.

‘Oh, there you are!’ was her greeting. ‘I thought you were all asleep. People do sleep at all sorts of times in the country. I should, if I lived in the country altogether. May I come in? If I may, don’t stand looking at me as if I were an apparition. If I may not, be good enough to say so.’

I opened the door wide, and she accepted that act as invitation to enter. Happily she could see the parlour, and my grandmother sitting there, the moment she set foot inside our habitation, or I do not know how I should ever have asked her to walk in.

As it happened, she stepped briskly forward and greeted my grandmother, who rose from her seat as she advanced.

‘You are Mrs Motfield, I suppose,’ said Miss Cleeves, holding out her hand, which my grandmother took as if she did not know what to do with it. ‘I want you to let Annie come out with me for a little while. She would, perhaps, like to see the gardens at the Great House, and there are none of the men about on Sundays—not at this hour. May she come?’

I looked at my grandmother—she was, I knew, full of objections; she was considering how she should state them. If Miss Cleeves had given her time, I should never have seen those wonderful gardens; but Miss Cleeves did not give her time. Miss Cleeves repeated her request before my grandmother had, figuratively speaking, drawn her breath.

‘I do not know, Miss Cleeves, what to say,’ she hesitated. ‘Would your—would the Misses Wifforde——’

The woman who deliberates is lost. My grandmother had deliberated, and was lost.

‘Would my respected relatives object to my taking a Sunday walk “abroad with Sally?”’ interrupted Miss Cleeves. ‘Certainly not. They are darling old souls; but if they began to

object to my doings, I should pretty soon leave them and return to my mother, who is not a darling at all. Now, Miss Annie, if you mean to come with me, run up-stairs and put on your bonnet, and let us be off. Oh, you are not sure whether you may or may not ! She may, madam, is it not so ?'

She had all the assurance of fifty years of age, and, when she chose to assume them, the grand airs of the *ancienne noblesse*. That last clause in her sentence, and the tone in which it was uttered, settled the matter, and enabled us both to understand the nature of the dominion she exercised over our ladies at the Great House.

' You can go, Annie, if—if—you would like to do so,' said my grandmother, looking at me piteously ; but I was too young to take up the weapons she laid down with much success.

' You will want me at home, grannie,' I answered. I could not now put my own desires so far out of sight as I did in that sentence ; but then I was under subjection, which, perhaps, detracts from the merit of my self-denial.

' What a simpleton you are ! ' exclaimed Miss Cleeves, without giving my grandmother time to answer. ' I know you want to come with me, and you know I want you to come with me, and you know Mrs Motfield is not afraid of my eating you up ; therefore why will you not put on your bonnet at once ? She may put it on without any fear of a scolding afterwards ? ' This to my grandmother.

' I suppose so. I never scold Annie,' was the reply.

' Perhaps Annie is so good a little girl as never to require a scolding,' was the reply, which made me fire up in defence of my dearest friend.

' I am not good, Miss Cleeves,' I exclaimed, ' but grannie is, and she does not scold.'

' What a charming grandmother ! ' answered our visitor. ' What a delightful thing it must be where no one says a cross word to anybody ! Now, child, are you going to keep me waiting all day, or will you put on your bonnet at once ? '

' You are very kind, miss,' began my grandmother,

well knew, in respectful expostulation ; but Miss Cleeves gave her no time to finish her sentence.

‘ I am not kind at all. I came here to please myself, and I want to take Annie over the grounds to please myself also. It is frightfully dull up at the house, and she amuses me.

This was a light in which I had certainly never expected to find the matter placed, but it chanced to be the very one most calculated to win my grandmother’s consent.

‘ You had better not keep Miss Cleeves waiting, dear,’ she said, quietly ; and looking at her in astonishment, I saw at once she had taken up my former impression, and thought the intellect of Miss Wifforde’s relative was affected. ‘ Will you take a seat, miss ?’ she asked.

The last sentence I heard my new acquaintance utter as I left the room was, ‘ No, thank you ; I hate sitting. How people can remain glued to a chair for hours together, I cannot imagine.’

During the short time I was absent, she contrived to take a correct mental inventory of our furniture and other effects. She criticised the pictures ; she was good enough to admire some of our ornaments ; she would have opened and tried the spinet, had not she been mildly reminded that it chanced to be Sunday ; she looked at the views from the window ; and having finally exhausted our interior, was about to make her way out into the garden, when I made my appearance.

‘ What a time you have been !’ was her remark. ‘ I could have put on fifty bonnets since you went up-stairs. Now bid your grandmother good-bye, for perhaps I shall never let you come back to her again.’ After which speech she took me by the hand, just as though I was only about six years old, and in this manner conducted me to the entrance gates of that domain it had been my habit, almost from infancy, to regard with a kind of holy awe.

CHAPTER XI.

I AM DECEIVED.

HAD Miss Cleeves given me time to enjoy myself, that Sunday afternoon's walk through those lovely grounds would have been one of the happiest of my life ; but she hurried me so fast from lawns to gardens, from gardens to park, from aviary to lake, from summer-house to waterfall, that I could only carry back to our cottage a confused memory of trees and turf, and parterres filled with exquisite flowers ; of an all-pervading scent of heliotrope ; of hot-houses, where hundreds of bunches of grapes hung from the roof, while peaches clustered thick on the trellis-work at the back.

She took me into the conservatory, where there was not a plant I had ever seen before ; she dragged me away almost by force from an entranced contemplation of silver and gold pheasants ; she scarcely permitted a moment to be employed in viewing the swans. Only once did she allow a decided halt, and that was under a mulberry-tree. There in an incredibly short space of time she ate about a pint of the fruit, and came away with her hands dyed violet, and her dress stained in several places with the juice.

'Lucky it is not a silk,' she remarked, when I drew her attention to this fact. 'Aunt said this morning it was getting too chilly for muslins ; but I carried my point. I detest silk dresses ; don't you ?'

My experience of them having been limited, I was unable to give a satisfactory answer.

'I like dresses,' proceeded Miss Cleeves, "'hat wash, and are clean again. What is the good of being in the country if one has to be got up perpetually like a stiff-starched frill ? It is very well for old ladies, who do not want to run about and enjoy

themselves, to be arrayed in all sorts of magnificence ; but I cannot see why young people should be victimized with fine clothes ; can you ?'

My Sunday apparel having been always a trouble to me, I could agree with her on this point, and felt glad to do so.

' You must find it very dull living all alone with your grandmother, and never having a young person to speak to,' she said after a pause.

' I do not care much for young persons,' I answered ; ' the few I have known never made themselves particularly pleasant to me.'

' Present company of course excepted,' she said.

' Yes,' was my reply ; ' I like the little I have seen of you very well.'

' Very well, indeed !' she repeated, laughing. ' There is an ungrateful wretch, after all the trouble I have taken on your behalf. The least you might have said was that you liked me very much.'

' But, Miss Cleeves,' I expostulated, ' you told my grandmother you did not take all that trouble to please me, but to please and amuse yourself.'

' Ah, that was only my amiable way of putting it,' she remarked, carelessly. ' When you are as old as I am, you will not think of taking everything *au pied de la lettre*.'

' What does that mean ?' I inquired.

' Why, you little dunce, do you not understand half a dozen words of the simplest French ?'

I felt my face burn and my eyes fill with tears at her insolence, but I answered bravely enough—

' What chance have I ever had of learning anything ?'

For a moment she remained silent, then giving my hand a swing backwards and forwards, she said—

' That was a very rude speech of mine, and I beg your pardon. I am sorry to have vexed you.'

' You did not vex me—much,' was my answer ; ' but I have often and often wished I knew more.'

' Yes,' she replied, and walked on without speaking for a

little time. Then she turned to me abruptly, and began, ' What does your grandmother intend to do with you ? '

' She does not intend to do anything with me that I know of.'

' Does she not mean to have you properly educated ? '

' She thinks I have learned all it is necessary for a girl in my station to understand.'

' And what is that " all," if I may inquire ? '

' I can read, and write, and do accounts ; I can sew pretty well, and could knit stockings, only granny likes best to knit them herself ; I am able to make bread, and butter. I do not think I have learned anything else.'

' And I suppose ultimately your grandmother will want you to marry some respectable young man whose dairy you can look after, besides attending to his comfort and welfare generally.'

' I have not heard grannie say anything about it ; but I am sure she would be vexed if I ever married a man who was not respectable.'

' What a funny child you are ! ' exclaimed Miss Cleeves ; ' funny old-fashioned little monkey ! It is a blessing people are so differently constituted. Had I your voice, not all the grandmothers, mothers, and aunts in England should keep me in Love-dale an hour. I would go and make my way in the world, ay, even if I had to sing about the streets, till somebody recognized my gift and took me by the hand.'

' Hush, hush ! ' I cried, for her vehemence frightened me. ' What can you want more than you have now ? '

' What have I ? ' she asked.

' All these beautiful gardens, all this lovely place. You have a grand house, you have carriages and horses.'

' They are not mine,' she said, sullenly.

' They are as good as yours,' I answered, with for me considerable spirit, as I considered she was underrating her advantages and depreciating the Misses Wifforde's kindness. ' They are as good as yours. This place is as much your home as our little cottage is mine. You can walk about and pull the flowers.

and eat the fruit, just as I do, and some day you will marry Mr Sylvester and be mistress here.'

'Yes, that is the programme,' she observed.

'And you will be quite happy, then.'

'Assuredly,' she agreed, with a covert smile which belied her words. 'When I am married to Sylvester, and when I am mistress here, I shall be quite happy, no doubt.'

'You puzzle me,' I said.

'How shocking, how sinful to puzzle that dear wise little head of yours! I believe one of my earliest exploits was crying for the moon—in some shape or other I have been crying for the moon ever since.'

'But what is the good of crying, if crying wont get a thing?'

'My mother would tell you—— But there, let us talk about something else. Come into the house, I want to show you my piano.'

At this suggestion I drew back appalled. With much fear and trembling I had already followed her amongst many head of horned cattle; I had been knocked down by a huge dog; I had even ventured after my guide into the stables, and accepted her peremptory invitation to enter the loose stall tenanted by Mr Sylvester's favourite horse.

'They are all as quiet as kittens,' explained Miss Cleeves; 'indeed, the carriage horses have no more spirit than old cats;' and by these and other assurances she had seduced me into dangerous proximity with creatures that had hind legs and stood seventeen hands high. But follow my leader any farther, I dared not.

Lured on by a certain fascination I had, with a shrinking trepidation, allowed myself to be led into the stable-yard, from which I could see many windows that looked out from the back of the Great House; but the thought of entering the house itself appalled me.

What if Miss Wifforde saw a stranger within her gates? what if already she had seen me? As the idea occurred, I tried to pull my hand away, with some dim idea of rushing off into the pine wood and secreting myself there. We were under the

shadow of the pine branches when Miss Cleeves made her suggestion, and escape at the moment seemed easy and desirable. But my companion was stronger than I.

‘No, my dear,’ she said, tightening her hold; ‘you are my prisoner, and I shall not let you away till it suits my sovereign will and pleasure; you remember I told your grandmother that possibly she might never see you again. There is a place for hanging up dresses in my bedroom as large as Red Rover’s box; I think I shall shut you up there, so that I can lay my hand on you whenever I want some one to talk to.’

I was not afraid of being locked up, but I was afraid of meeting any person.

How I besought the girl to let me go! how, even with tears, I begged and prayed of her to release me! But she only laughed at my entreaties; and when at length [I threw myself on my knees before her, she laughed still louder.

The advantage was all on her side. She was not merely older and stronger than I, but she was a vixen in her strength. She did not care whether she hurt me or not; I dared not have hurt Miss Cleeves.

‘You horrid obstinate little wretch,’ she cried, her eyes sparkling with fury; ‘I wonder at your presuming to set up your will against mine. Will you come into the house this moment, as I desire you? I shall beat you if you try my temper any longer. And besides, what is the use of your struggling? You know if you kicked, or scratched, or bit me, I could have you sent to prison, and fed on bread and water. You are a nasty ungrateful little thing; I wanted to be friends with you, and this is the way in which I am treated in return.’

Blinded with tears and fairly conquered, I listened to this graphic *resumé* of my sins, and then endeavoured to effect a compromise.

Would she promise to let me leave the instant I had seen her piano? Would she insure that I should not meet her aunts or Miss Hunter, or anybody? Would she allow me to run home by myself through the dusk fast, because my grandmother must be getting uneasy?

All this I asked, and to all of it she replied—No! She refused to promise anything but this—that if I would not do what she asked, she would never forgive me; she would never speak to me while she lived again.

‘And I will tell my aunts what a wicked girl you are, and they will not let you stay in their cottage,’ she finished; and then, when I reluctantly agreed to accompany her, she broke into a peal of laughter, and said—

‘What a goose you are!’

It was therefore by reason of gross intimidation that I entered the Great House. To my intense relief the front door stood open, and we entered and passed through the hall, which was unlighted, without meeting any servant. Miss Cleeves, still suspiciously keeping hold of my wrist (it was black and swollen for a fortnight afterwards), led the way up four steps, broad and easy, then along a wide corridor, at the extreme end of which she opened a door, and signing me to enter, I stood next moment in the presence of Miss Laura and Miss Dorothea Wifforde.

Consider my feelings. Never had I been so terrified before; not even when at St Stephen’s I had crept one Saturday evening into the dark church to listen to a rehearsal which was being held by the light of dips in the organ-loft, the form that I intended to sit down upon tipped over with a noise sufficient to bring organist and choir to a standstill, and to cause me to flee out into the graveyard as though a thousand ghosts were in hot pursuit. Never before—not when Mrs Isaac Motfield opened her vials of wrath, and poured them over my devoted head—had fear taken such absolute possession of me, body and soul. No street Arab suddenly dragged from his accustomed gutter, and accorded the unwished-for honour of an interview with his temporal lord—the lord of a year—could have experienced one-half the agony that fell to my lot when introduced by that faithless and perverse girl into such high and mighty company.

There, at the entrance of a large room—a room so large indeed that to look down it seemed to me like looking down the main aisle of St Stephen’s—lighted, and that only dimly, by a smouldering wood fire, stood I, Annie Trenet, with Miss Cleeves,

a heavy oaken door possessed of an immense handle, a long corridor, four steps, a wide hall, another door which my companion had closed on her entrance, more steps, an avenue apparently interminable, and the lodge gates, between me and liberty.

At the other end of the room sat the Misses Wifforde and Mr Sylvester. On a table beside Miss Laura stood a hissing urn. They were not prepared for or expecting visitors even in their own rank of life. I knew how solemn a matter the entertainment of an invited guest was in our humble home, how utter the dismay when an uninvited one appeared at our doors. The solemnity and the dismay I mentally intensified after the fashion of a rule of three.

Given that the arrival of an unwished-for visitor caused a certain amount of annoyance and confusion in the Motfield household, what would it do in the Wifforde?

Never before did I cast out a sum so rapidly; and the result was—led on and deluded by Miss Cleeves, I had sinned past hope of pardon.

Too young still to find relief in strong phrases, I did not even whisper to myself, ‘God forgive her, for I cannot;’ but I know I felt some sentence of that sort.

Here will the reader pardon a digression? Since I have arrived at years of discretion, the conclusion has been forced upon me, that when the period of strong feeling is well-nigh ended, that of strong expression commences; once we begin the tragedy of words, the tragedy of sensation must be a story of old. Which all, no doubt, will seem like nonsense-writing, for so quiet a tale as that of my poor life. But everything is comparative; and from my youth upwards the Misses Wifforde had bounded the limits of my social horizon, therefore the bating of breath and the quickening of pulse that occurred at the moment may perhaps be imperfectly understood, can certainly not be described.

It may be thought that, spite of doors and corridor, I might have fled even then. But to me flight was impossible; I stood rooted to the carpet, whilst I heard, as in a dream, a voice asking—

‘Where have you been, Lizzie? Sylvester went every place he could think of to look for you, but without success.’

‘It is a great pity Sylvester gave himself so much trouble,’ answered Miss Cleeves, advancing towards the fireplace, and pulling me after her; ‘he knows perfectly well I am not at all likely to tumble into the lake or the deep pool, and that is about the only sort of accident that could possibly occur in such benighted regions as these. I have passed a very profitable and pleasant afternoon in showing Miss Trenet (Miss Wifforde, Miss Trenet—general introduction considered as effected) the gardens and domain of the Great House. Miss Trenet is much impressed by the beauty and grandeur of the Wifforde estate, and considers that “of such is the kingdom of heaven.”’

The fire was low, and Miss Wifforde short-sighted, therefore she had not the slightest chance of recognizing me, even supposing she had in her drives to and fro chanced to become aware of the fact of my existence.

‘How do you do, my dear?’ she said therefore in the kindest manner imaginable, extending her hand as she spoke. ‘I cannot at the moment recall to my mind where I have heard the name of Trenet before, but it sounds familiar. I hope your grandmamma’s rheumatism is better.’

‘Thank you, ma’am,’ I answered, perfectly bewildered at this reception, ‘she is pretty well.’

‘I am glad to hear that,’ was the reply. ‘I feared from your grandpapa’s manner this morning that it was rather a serious attack.’

‘Gracious goodness, aunt!’ here interposed Miss Cleeves, ‘you do not suppose, surely, I should have devoted a whole afternoon to that horrid little girl the Rawlings have imported. This creature is a discovery and possession of my own. I have stolen her as the fairies steal babies. She is nobody’s child; and she lives nowhere in particular, unless it may be in the middle of the Love, where I made her acquaintance, singing like one of those insufficiently clothed young women who have no wardrobe to speak of, excepting a shock of hair and a looking-glass.’

‘Elizabeth!’ exclaimed Miss Laura, in a tone of expostulation.

‘Miss Laura Wifforde, my dear aunt, will you kindly pour out a cup of tea for this orphan child, whom I have adopted?’ was all the notice that dreadful Miss Cleeves took of the implied reproof.

But matters had now come to a pass when I felt I must speak.

‘I am very much obliged,’ I began—and my voice shook so painfully, that I had to jerk the words out, throwing each one singly, as it were, at my listeners; ‘but I would rather not have any tea, thank you—and oh, if you would let me go back to my grandmother! She will think I am lost; she will be so vexed at my having dared to come here.’

‘I declare, Annie Trenet, you are enough to provoke a saint!’ cried out Miss Cleeves, before any one else could speak. ‘Everything was going on so beautifully; and you have spoilt it all. See if I ever take any more trouble for you again. You may stay at home for ever, and never see anything worth seeing, or hear anything worth hearing, for aught I care;’ and Miss Cleeves was turning from me with an expression of anger and disdain when Miss Wifforde interposed her authority.

‘Lizzie,’ she began—and by the flame that was licking its way round a log Mr Sylvester had thrown on the fire, I could see she looked pained and angry—‘in this house you *shall* pay some regard to the most ordinary rules of courtesy. Whoever this young lady may be, you have most grievously hurt her feelings—’

‘And she has hurt mine!’ interrupted Miss Cleeves. “I wanted to be friends with her, and she would not let me.”

‘Oh, Miss Cleeves, how can you say so?’ I cried out. ‘You did show me beautiful things to-day, and I shall never forget them; and I am grateful. But—but—if I might only go home, ma’am’—this to Miss Wifforde, in utter despair of being able to finish my sentence as I had intended.

‘Certainly, my dear, you shall go home,’ answered Miss Wifforde, kindly; ‘but first have a cup of tea and piece of cake, and then, if you will tell us where you live, some one shall return you safely to your grandmother.’

'I can go home alone quite well, thank you,' I said ; 'and I would rather not have any tea, please.'

'What a strange girl!' remarked Miss Laura Wifforde, whilst Mr Sylvester, looking on, said nothing, but glanced towards Miss Cleeves ; and, as if in answer to that glance, she came across to the spot where I was standing with Miss Wifforde, who was standing also, looking down upon me in puzzled silence.

'Little Trenet,' she began, 'I have been very rude to you, and I am sorry for it. Let us kiss, and be friends ;' and she suited the action to the words. 'Here is a seat ; take your tea, and I will tell my aunts all about it. One morning last week,' continued Miss Cleeves, leaning on the back of an easy-chair she had pushed me into, and addressing her audience over my head, 'while the other members of this household were wrapped in slumber—the servants here, I may remark, do not rise with the lark—I walked down to the river, expecting to find that pleasing stream as quiet and commonplace as ever. To my astonishment, however, as I neared its bank, I heard some one singing—not a subdued song, not after the fashion in which one generally hears words and music alike murdered, but out loud and clear, like a lark, or a prima donna, or a street crier, if you like that comparison better. My river nymph was seated on a stone in the middle of the stream, which rippled an accompaniment to her melody ; and the ballad she had selected, and which she sang *à la* Madame Serlini, with long-drawn pauses and other thrilling effects, was "Home, Sweet Home." Although I did not in the least believe her to be anything but a spirit, I considered it my duty to applaud.'

'Dear Lizzie,' said Miss Laura, interrupting, 'do get on with your story a little faster.'

'I must either tell my story my own way, or not at all,' answered Miss Cleeves.

'Could you not give us the outline first, and fill in the details afterwards?' inquired Mr Sylvester.

'No, I could not. Shall I proceed, or shall I for ever after hold my tongue?'

‘Proceed, by all means,’ decided Miss Wifforde, and Miss Cleeves triumphantly resumed her narrative.

‘Where was I when you, Aunt Laura, interrupted the flow of my discourse?—Oh, clapping my hands and shouting brava so enthusiastically that my songstress jumped up, frightened apparently out of whatever amount of senses she possessed; I then recognized her as the impressionable small person who had wept so bitterly—why it is not for me to pretend to guess—when *Il Barbiere* was performed at Fairport.

‘Of course I immediately inquired how it happened she had been transported from the stage-box in Fairport theatre to a great stone in the middle of the Love; whereupon she favoured me with various domestic particulars, stating, amongst other matters, that she was an orphan, the daughter of an artist, and that she lived in a white cottage down yonder with her grandmother, all of which, being interrupted, means that my nymph, when in the flesh and not in the spirit, takes up her abode in a certain picturesque dwelling on the way between here and Lovedale, owned by the Misses Wifforde, and tenanted by Mrs Motfield.’

‘So, then,’ exclaimed Miss Wifforde, in the same kindly tones as before, only frosted—with the same amount of cordiality, only iced—‘you are old Mrs Motfield’s granddaughter? I hope you will be a good girl, and try to prove a comfort to her; for she has known much sorrow.’

How glad I was I had not tasted their tea or touched even a crumb of their cake!

Somehow, the fact of my abstinence enabled me to answer with more spirit than I had yet displayed, that ‘my grandmother often said she did not know what she should do without me.’

‘An observation which, incredible as it may seem, I can vouch to be accurately reported,’ said Miss Cleeves. ‘Mrs Motfield really cherishes the most touching faith in her grandchild’s goodness; but you have not allowed me to complete my story.’

‘I think it is unnecessary for you to continue it,’ remarked Miss Wifforde. ‘We understand now who this—who Miss Trenet is; and if she will finish her tea, Thomas shall walk

home with her, as no doubt Mrs Motfield must feel uneasy at her absence.

‘No doubt Mrs Motfield feels perfectly easy in the matter,’ retorted Miss Cleeves. ‘I told her, as plainly as I could speak, that she need not be afraid of my eating Annie up. She knows the girl is quite safe with me.’

‘Nevertheless, my dear, as it is getting very dark, and as Mrs Motfield probably keeps early hours, I think that if Miss Trenet——’

‘I will not have any tea, thank you,’ I said decidedly, interrupting the inevitable finish of her sentence I foresaw; ‘and I do not want any one to go home with me, please; and I am very much obliged for your kindness, Miss Cleeves; and—and good evening, ma’am,’ I concluded, hurriedly, wondering how I was ever to reach the end of that immense room—walk all over those intermediate yards of carpeting by myself.

‘I am going to Mr Rawlings,’ remarked Mr Sylvester, quietly, ‘and will see that no harm reaches this young lady between here and the cottage, which I know by sight perfectly well.’

‘I will go with you to the parsonage,’ cried out Miss Cleeves.

‘You have had quite walking enough to-day, ‘Lizzie,’ suggested Miss Laura.

‘Not one-half enough,’ she replied.

‘I would much rather you remained quietly at home,’ remarked Mr Sylvester, with charming candour.

‘I know you would, and for that very reason I intend to walk unquietly abroad. Besides, I promised to return this lamb safe into the Motfield fold. Come, little Trenet; we will run all the way down the hill, and make Sylvester angry, if you like.’

That was a mode of spending a Sunday evening to suggest under the very noses of the Misses Wifforde; and as they stood, with those noses rather uplifted in the air, too proud to wrangle with their relative, too proud even to interpose their authority before a stranger, I could not help feeling thankful that my lot had been cast in a cottage instead of in that immense house with

those stately ladies, who looked as though they never could have been young, for guardians.

They were, however, too genuinely, after their fashion, gentle-women not to endeavour, though vainly, to set me at my ease ere I departed from the Great House.

Of mine own accord I should never have ventured a more familiar leave-taking than that previously recorded ; but Miss Wifforde held out her hand, on the fingers of which diamonds glittered, and retained mine a moment while she said, ‘Tell Mrs Motfield I believe her grandchild to be a good and modest girl.’

While Miss Laura added, ‘I am sorry your feelings should have been wounded in this house, and that you would not take your tea.’

Oh, that tea ! But they meant it all kindly, those stately old ladies. They were very good to me, considering the circumstances under which I made their acquaintance.

Imagine, if you can (you being a humble member of the middle classes of society), a madcap young princess seducing you into the innermost sanctum of Windsor Castle, upon the privacy of her most gracious majesty Queen Victoria.

Whether the deed be possible or not, my limited knowledge of such establishments does not enable me to decide. The reader is only requested to imagine such a catastrophe.

For my own part, kings and queens, emperors and empresses, were vague and impalpable powers, when compared with our ladies of the Great House.

Always in the future, when I heard that passage read in the Scriptures concerning those who were supposed to be drunk with new wine, I imagined they must have looked and felt as I did when, having just crossed the threshold of another life, I lifted my feet hurriedly from the steps, and thankfully retraced my way, still dizzy, still like one in a dream, to my humble home, which I fancied, in my ignorance, I should never wish to leave again.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS CLEEVES' OPINIONS.

'SIL,' began Miss Cleeves, when we were clear of the house, 'did not the old ladies act "more poker" splendidly this evening?'

'I wish you would not ridicule them, Lizzie,' he replied; 'you know I cannot bear to hear you.'

'True, and I ought not to annoy you; but still, you must admit their backbones have been gradually stiffening into iron for innumerable centuries. Iron is not iron, but something else, in the first instance; and they, so long in process of stiffening, stiffened up into harder metal than ever when I introduced my protégée.'

'And they were right to do so. I had no business to go to the Great House, and you had no business to take me, Miss Cleeves,' I answered. Out in the darkness, with the cool wind blowing upon my hot forehead, I was not afraid to speak my mind, and I spoke it.

'A miracle!' exclaimed Miss Cleeves; 'little Trenet has found her tongue, and the power to use it. Go on, my dear. There is no evening service anywhere; and if there were, we should not attend it. In such and such a chapter, and at such and the twenty-four following verses, you will find it written—go on, Annie; the congregation has found the text, and is all attention.'

'What is my text, then, Miss Cleeves?' I asked.

'Old heads shall be put on young shoulders immediately,' she replied without a moment's hesitation; 'for such is the law and the prophets.'

'My dear Lizzie, how can you be so absurd, and, I must add, so irreverent?' asked Mr Sylvester.

'My dear Sil, the life we lead ought to make any young

person absurd and irreverent. You, of course, are different, because when you came into the world the nurse found out you had already learned your A B C and Catechism. For my own part, I believe our respected Aunt Dorothy was born in a front, and had a set of false teeth in her cradle.'

' You know,' he interposed, rather vehemently, ' she wears her own beautiful grey hair, and that there is nothing false about her.'

' You need not get into a passion over the matter,' she suggested ; ' I only spoke metaphorically ; but I put it to you now as a matter of belief and fact : do you or do you not believe that when Miss Wifforde made her *début* on the stage of this wicked world, she was got up regardless of expense ; with her hair quite smooth, and her clothing fitting her without a crease ? My opinion is she came into existence beautifully dressed, and looking precisely what she does now—the primmest, stateliest, dearest, most provoking old lady in Christendom.'

' Why provoking ?'

' Oh, because she has a certain standard to which she would raise and lower all people. She cannot understand youth. Only to think how many hundred years must have come and gone since she was young herself ! She cannot comprehend young people ; she cannot comprehend me.'

' You think that a very remarkable want of understanding ?' He said this quietly, but I fancied I could detect a lurking sneer in his voice as he put the question.

' Yes ; I am sure a child might understand me.'

' I am by no means so certain of that,' he replied. ' What does Miss Trenet say ?'

' I think it is very easy to understand Miss Cleeves,' was my answer, finding one expected.

' You sweet darling ! and what do you understand about Miss Cleeves ?' coming round to the side on which I was walking, and putting her arm round my neck.

' I think you like your own way, and are angry when any one else wants her way.'

' Meaning you and me.'

'Meaning you and anybody.' I said this bravely.

'There's a little rustic for you, Sil,' remarked Miss Cleeves after a pause, which I know now was one of mortification. 'There is your simple country maiden. If she be so caustic in her teens, what will she prove at thirty?'

'That is a problem I really cannot solve,' replied Mr Sylvester; and for a few minutes we all walked on in silence.

Then the young gentleman, wanting perhaps to soothe the trouble he knew I must have felt that evening, began to talk to me about myself and my home.

More especially, I remember, he spoke concerning music like one who loved it; and when the young moon was rising over the plantations of the Wifforde domain, I told him I never heard or imagined anything like Madame Serlini's singing; at which statement he smiled and said—

'You are not singular in your opinion. Some of the best musical critics of the day believe there never has been, and never will be, such another prima donna as Lucia Serlini, and I am inclined to agree with them. But you have a wonderful voice yourself, my cousin reports,' he went on; 'what do you intend to do with it?'

'I, sir? Nothing,' was my answer.

How I was growing to hate my voice, which seemed always getting me into scrapes! If I could have buried it in the deep pool that night, it should never have prepared fresh troubles for me.

'Adhere to that resolution,' he said, 'and you will do well.'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Miss Cleeves; 'she will make the best of that wonderful gift which God has given her, or do very ill. Suppose we had talents, Sil—or enough talent to make those we possess available—should we not turn them to account?'

There came no answer to this. Looking at the pair stealthily, as we three walked soberly along the road, I vaguely understood that they were unhappy; that the bread of dependence—be it ever so thickly spread with butter—must of necessity seem dry and tasteless in the mouths of some who have to eat it day by day

Just as I had refused my tea and cake that night, so would they have refused some portions of their entertainment had they dared.

Somehow in my head there took root at that moment an idea that life is not so out of proportion as we are apt in our ignorance to think it. Early or late, one must begin to learn the letters of the social alphabet, with the view of reading the truths of our existence aright.

My first introduction into grand society commenced that curious process of education which, as it can never be considered quite ended until some one closes our eyelids for us in the last sleep earth knows, may not, I think, inappropriately be termed the education of hereafter; since having been going on through all time, it must somehow, for good or for evil, influence eternity.

As we neared the cottage I could see my grandmother standing by the gate, watching evidently for me. She had a shawl wrapped round her head and shoulders, so I knew she must have been standing there for a considerable period.

‘Oh, Miss Cleeves,’ I cried, my conscience smiting me for having caused that dear old woman a moment’s anxiety, ‘grannie is out waiting for me—see !’

‘Don’t be afraid,’ answered the young lady. ‘It was all my fault ; and when I tell her so she will not be angry.’

‘She is never angry with me ; I told you so before,’ I replied, a little rudely ; ‘but she must have been uneasy or she would not be standing there, and I cannot bear to grieve her.’

Hearing which, Miss Cleeves and Mr Sylvester exchanged glances, and the latter said—

‘Suppose you run on and tell her you have come back safe and sound. We shall not be more than two minutes after you.’

No sooner said than done. Along the moonlit road I darted like an arrow released from the bow. Oh, what a sense of freedom seemed to enter my soul as I sped on, cleaving the crisp air of that clear bright autumn night !

I fancy the birds as they fly must feel the same sort of delight as I experienced. The noise made by my steps on the sandy road, slight though it was, quickened me to more rapid

motion, and my breath came fast as, throwing my arms about her neck, I panted out—

‘It is I, grannie ; so glad to get back to you at last.’

‘Where have you been all this time, child ?’ she asked. ‘I could not rest indoors, thinking that something had happened to you. Where have you been ?’

‘At the Great House,’ was my answer. ‘I could not get away earlier. Miss Cleeves and Mr Sylvester brought me home.’

‘Brought you home ! You are dreaming. Brought you home, indeed ! What next, I wonder !’

‘I hope you have not been uneasy about Annie, Mrs Motfield,’ cried Miss Cleeves, now distant about a dozen yards ; ‘you remember I promised to bring her safe back to you, and here she is.’

‘You have taken far too much trouble, Miss,’ was the reply, ‘far too much. My duty to you, sir.’

This to Miss Cleeves’ companion, who raised his hat to my grandmother as though she had been a duchess.

‘How deliciously sweet the flowers smell here !’ exclaimed Miss Cleeves, inhaling the odours of our humble parterre as though they had never a plant or shrub in the whole of the Wifforde domain.

‘Do not they smell as sweet at the Great House ?’ Mr Sylvester inquired.

‘No, I think not,’ was the reply. ‘One always meets with flowers in a small garden that are never to be found in a large one—I have often remarked that fact ; but Mrs Motfield’s is altogether the dearest little house I ever saw in my life.’

‘Would you be pleased to walk in, Miss, and rest for awhile ?’ asked my grandmother.

I saw she did not like making the proposition lest she should seem taking a liberty, but she liked less the notion of appearing inhospitable.

‘Yes,’ answered Miss Cleeves, ‘it would please me very much indeed, if I should not be in your way. If you are going to those tiresome Rawlings, Sil, you might call for me as you return, or you can come in if you choose.’

‘What does Mrs Motfield say?’ he asked, with a pleasant smile.

‘I shall only be too much honoured, sir,’ she replied ; and accordingly we all four entered the house, and passed into the sitting-room, which seemed crowded by the unusual number of occupants.

‘Is not it a darling cosy tiny morsel of a place?’ cried Miss Cleeves, appealing to her relative. ‘Is not it a curiosity parlour? Would not Aunt Laura give her eyes for that old china? Dear Mrs Motfield, where did you get those heavenly cups and saucers?’

‘It was a custom of ours—a remnant of superstition it may seem to some persons, a proof to others that we were, as I have stated, very low indeed in the social scale—always on Sundays to wear and use the best of everything we possessed. Let the morning be ever so wet, let the sky be ever so murky, or the snow ever so deep, still, when we rose from our beds, we put on the newest and freshest of our clothes, we added some little dainty to our ordinary fare, we set out whatever of value or ornament our drawers and cupboards contained, we drank our tea out of delicate china cups, that had come from the far-away village where my father was buried, and it was poured from a silver tea-pot, which all the rest of the week we kept wrapped well up in flannel and locked carefully away.

It was therefore to very old and very beautiful china indeed that Miss Cleeves had directed her attention. My grandmother must have delayed the evening meal for my appearance, since the tray stood on the little table beside the hearth, and the tea had not, I saw, gone even through that solemn process known to us careful folks as being ‘wetted.’

‘You have not yet had tea,’ went on Miss Cleeves, as was her custom, without waiting for an answer to her question about the china. ‘Pray, Mrs Motfield, do ask me to have some with you. Annie has not had a drop, though I stood guard over her on one side, and Miss Wifforde on the other, trying to make her swallow some. Sunday is the only day in the week we have no dinner; why is known alone to Providence and my aunts. The

Wiffordes have some legend about the servants wanting to go to afternoon church—a total myth, I may remark by the way—and the consequence is, the moment we get back from morning service we are expected to eat a horrid cold luncheon, that is, I believe, laid out over night, as though it were a funeral feast, and we get nothing more, excepting a cup of tea, till nine o'clock, when we have supper—also cold—after which, and prayers, we are all very glad to bid each other good-night. The only comfort about the matter is, that the servants have to do with cold meat too, which I am sure is a serious trial to them.'

So this was the way of keeping Sunday that obtained at the Great House. On the whole, I concluded our modest festivity and perusal of the *Pilgrim's Progress* appeared a more enticing programme.

Miss Cleeves, at all events, seemed to enjoy her Sunday evening in our little parlour; and even Mr Sylvester, although she occasionally shocked his sense of grave propriety, could not always avoid laughing at her ceaseless chatter.

As to my grandmother, she listened, fairly amazed; not an idea, a prejudice, or an opinion of her life but Miss Cleeves knocked over like ninepins.

She sat there, dressed in her best black nerino gown, with a pure white kerchief of fine lawn, clear-starched and ironed by her own hands, folded across her bosom, and secured at the throat by a brooch, set round with pearls, containing her mother's hair, with her white locks smoothly braided back under the high widow's cap, the fashion of which had never been altered in my memory, hearkening to this rattle-brained miss, who seemed to respect nothing in the heavens or on the earth.

She never spoke of the Misses Wifforde save as old darlings, or funny old things; she ridiculed the way in which the whole country-side fell down and worshipped before them; she called the Great House the High Place of Lovedale, and said the inhabitants thought it much more worthy of reverence than either church or chapel; she described the Lovedalites as being in matters of religion Catholics and Dissenters—both sects being disciples of Wifforde; she thought a London season wou'd kill

the poor dears, they would never survive, she declared, finding out, as a practical fact, that there were other families, richer, older, more remarkable than theirs ; she inclined to a belief that if they had married fifty years before, and been blessed with twelve children apiece, a more intimate knowledge of the ways of young people must have ensued.

And all through the discourse my grandmother could not get in a word, even edgeways—no, not although Miss Cleeves ate more bread-and-butter covered thick with plum jam than I had ever seen consumed even by Tommy at Fairport, and drank her tea as though the old china cup imparted an extraordinary and delicious flavour to it.

The whole thing was like a dream, as much like a dream as my visit to the Great House, only more pleasant.

We felt far more at home with Mr Sylvester and his cousin than had ever been the case when Miss Hunter favoured us with a call. He was so courteous, and she so lively. She told us all about her own home, and her relations ; gave us a description of Dacres Park ; favoured us with reminiscences of her early life ; and imparted to my grandmother's astonished ears the intelligence that she was utterly weary of highly civilized stupidity, and that if she could choose her own career, and were possessed of any talent, she would turn ballad-singer, opera-dancer, or author before she would lead the monotonous existence most of the women she knew were doomed to pass.

Then, having finished her tea, and her general conversation, or rather declamation, she suddenly said to my grandmother—

‘What are you going to do with Annie?’

‘I do not exactly know what you mean, Miss,’ was the reply ; while I pitifully whispered to Miss Cleeves—

‘Don’t, please ; please, don’t.’

‘Be quiet, you stupid little thing !’ she answered, quite out loud. ‘I want to know whether you intend to let her voice waste its sweetness on the desert air of Lovedale, or whether you mean to have her properly instructed and brought out.’

‘I would rather not talk about Annie, if you will excuse my speaking so plainly,’ said my grandmother quietly enough, though

I could see her face flush and her hands tremble. 'She has been placed by God in an humble path of life in comparison to yours, Miss ; and I hope she will be content to walk in it honestly and discreetly, as her people have tried to do before her.'

'Yes, grannie, I will !' I exclaimed ; and what I said at the moment I meant.

The glimpses caught of the world outside my home had not seemed to me very alluring ; my experiences of general society had not proved uninterruptedly pleasant. Altogether home seemed to me that evening a very desirable place in which to dwell, my path in life a more congenial one than that trodden by the Misses Wifforde.

'There seems to be a delightful unanimity between you two,' remarked Miss Cleeves, 'as charming as it is novel. Nevertheless——'

'Lizzie,' interrupted Mr Sylvester at this point, 'Mrs Motfield has already told you she does not desire to discuss the question, and you should respect her wishes.'

'That is the manner in which all mine are usually repressed,' said Miss Cleeves, turning to my grandmother, and laughing good-humouredly. 'Nevertheless,' she proceeded, 'I shall come and see you one of these days quite by myself, and you and I will have a long chat, with never a soul to bid us nay.'

Had it been any other person but a relation of the Misses Wifforde who made this promise, I know my grandmother would have said she did not desire either her visits or her conversation or her counsel ; but as matters stood, she was compelled to declare she should feel proud and happy to see Miss Cleeves at any time.

'*Cela va sans dire*,' remarked the young lady to Mr Sylvester ; and at the time I thought her extremely ill-bred for talking in a foreign language before people who could not understand what she meant.

I have heard the same thing done, however, so often since by persons who profess the very highest breeding, that I am beginning to doubt the accuracy of my judgment in that, as in many other matters of more and less importance.

Be this as it may, after Miss Cleeves' short French sentence, we all seemed to get a little dull ; and I felt very glad when Mr Sylvester told his cousin she must really think of retracing her steps to the Great House.

'It is too late for Mr Rawlings,' he observed, as they passed out into the moonlight.

And Miss Cleeves answered—

'So far as I am concerned, I should always take good care it was too late for any of that delightful family.'

And then we locked and bolted the door, and went back into our parlour. But we could not lock and bolt out the world which had stepped across the threshold of our secluded home that day.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOWS.

'THAT 'long chat' concerning me and my prospects which Miss Cleeves had left our house fully intending to have all to herself, ere many days were over, was destined never to take place. Unaccustomed to such eccentricities as standing for an hour at her garden-gate on a chilly night in autumn, my grandmother remarked next morning that she feared she had taken cold. Before tea-time she became worse, and went to bed early, observing that a basin of gruel and a sound night's sleep would cure her.

She had the gruel, but not the night's sleep. When day broke, she, who was always earliest astir in that early house, called to inquire if I were awake ; and on my answering her in the affirmative, asked for some water.

'I have not closed my eyes all night,' she said, when I brought her a tumblerful of water cold as ice, which I had my-

self drawn from the picturesque well, arched over, and covered with moss, and ferns, and brambles. ‘ I don’t think I shall get up just yet, Nannie. I will turn round on my pillow, and try to have a nap. Kiss me, dear.’

With a great sense of fear, none the less terrible because undefined, I obeyed her wish. Then I tucked the bedclothes warmly round her, drew the blinds across the window, stole to the door on tiptoe, and leaving it just unlatched, went downstairs as quietly as I could.

What an eternity that morning seemed to be ! The sun, which had always before tempted me off to the river, or the woods, or the lanes, rose higher and higher, till I felt almost as though I hated his brightness. I went and talked to our then Jill about my grandmother’s illness, which she treated as a light matter, adding—

‘ I told her she would take cold, wandering up and down that damp walk at her time of life, with nothing but a shawl about her head, and you see I am right ; ’ which fact, I have no doubt, comforted her exceedingly.

Extracting but small consolation myself, however, from this proof of her prophetic powers, I sought Jack, whom I found in the cowhouse milking, his pail nearly full, and his shock head well planted into Cowslip’s flank.

Him I informed that my grandmother had a very severe cold, and was unable to get up. Whereupon he remarked ‘ it was a bad job ; ’ and his conversational talents being few, our talk ended.

After this I fed the fowls, which were hungry and greedy, and fought and pecked each other in a manner that in my then frame of mind disgusted me. So I threw down the remainder of the barley in a heap, for them to scratch among and quarrel over at their leisure, and wandered off into the garden ; where I plunged my hands into the beds of thyme, drawing my fingers backwards and forwards through the cushions of green leaves, ornamented with purple flowers. But the smell I usually loved so much seemed heavy and sickly, and I wondered how the great bees who came humming to their accustomed breakfast.

table while I was standing beside the herb border could be so fond of that honey-laden corner. The bleating of distant sheep, the cooing of the pigeons, the very murmur of the Love, brought no pleasure to my heart.

I was out of tune ; and, as is usual in such cases, the discord seemed in other instruments, not in mine own heart. I felt uneasy, not knowing why ; and nothing in creation appeared to have a fear but myself. I was unhappy, and yet all nature smiled and carolled as though existence did not contain such a thing as care. For the first time in my memory sickness and I had come face to face ; and sickness, to those who have been accustomed only to behold health, is a mystery and a dread.

Strong were the dwellers in Lovedale, strong and hardworking ; the hard work they did may indeed have been the principal secret of their strength. Small need was there for any doctor's services, save when children were brought into the world, or accidents happened, or little people caught childish diseases, or grown folk fell sick of that last illness which no doctor's skill is competent to cure. Now one dropped off, now another ; the passing-bell, the freshly heaped-up mound, repeated to our senses the truth we were told every Sunday, that 'man is mortal ;' but to me sickness and death had hitherto been abstract questions, utterly outside my own experience.

In my memory there had been no mortal illness, no fight for life, no forlorn struggle with disease beneath our roof.

Into that quiet home no intruder had ever come with ready rule and hypocritically sad face, to take measure and instructions for the last narrow house man may occupy ; no black procession had passed along the garden path, carrying something away which might return to the cottage never more ; no mound had during my time been added on our behalf to those which already billowed the green turf of Lovedale churchyard. Save for the black-sealed letter announcing my father's decease, death and I had not touched garments even in passing. When therefore I beheld my grandmother, whom I had never before heard complain of any ailment beyond rheumatic pains, a sore throat, a headache, or any other slight malady, so ill that she called me

to fetch her water, and then said she would lie in bed for a little while longer, I fell to conjuring up all sorts of sad fancies. She was ill, she was dying ; she would die, and I had killed her—I, aided and abetted by Miss Cleeves.

I could not see the far-off village, my eyes were so dim with tears. I ceased to hear the humming of bees and the songs of birds, by reason of the rushing noise made by the waves of remorse, as they surged in upon my heart.

Some one—Jill—had spoken that morning about her age ; it seemed hours and hours previously, but the sentence recurred over and over again. How old was she ? to what age did people generally live ? Threescore and ten, the Bible said—that was seventy years ; but then our minister, and other ministers to whose discourses I had been privileged to listen, stated few attained to the allotted span, whereas in my own memory four of the inhabitants of Lovedale and neighbourhood had not passed away from the midst of friends and kindred till past eighty.

This question of the ages at which people die was not one which had hitherto engaged my attention—strangely enough, by the way, since I suppose very young people and actuaries of insurance offices are the only persons who ever really take an interest in the statistics of mortality—but I intended in the future to redeem my time.

If my grandmother got better, I would go down to Lovedale churchyard early some morning and count over all the headstones it contained sacred to the memories of those who had died over seventy years of age.

The registrar-general I now know would have told me that every record I found to this effect would reduce the average, and seriously and deleteriously affect my grandmother's chances of recovery ; but I was unaware in those days that such a person existed, and imagined in my ignorance that if seven people had been able to live to ninety, there was all the more reason to suppose that another individual could do the same.

In a word, I concluded that what one man had done another man (or woman) might accomplish. Spite of registrar-generals,

I am not to the present day quite sure that there may not be a substratum of truth in my theory.

By it, at all events, I proposed to test my grandmother's chances of long life.

Standing in that dear old garden—the Love rippling far below on its way to the distant sea, the scents of autumn flowers around, the accustomed sounds in my ears, before my eyes the unaccustomed sight of drawn blinds veiling sickness that might be mortal—the idea of life holding a future for me in which our cottage and its inmates might have no part, first occurred to me.

A world without a home, a time when I should have no place to run back to, no grannie to welcome me, no tender voice to chide. It came to my soul vaguely in that early morning, while the sun shone so bright. I was young, but old enough to cogitate matters which have puzzled wiser heads than mine. I was small for my years ; and in some respects the growth of my mind had corresponded to that of my body. Some kindly influence, seeing the natural development, which might otherwise have proved unhealthy, perpetually 'pinched back' the leaflets I tried to send forth ; and the consequence was, that in comparison to other girls of the same age I remained without bud or promise of blossom. Sometimes when I see an experienced gardener nipping the young wood from off a plant that is making it prematurely, the time when I too was subjected to the same treatment recurs to me. All of sentiment, of fancy, of romance, of stretching forth, had been rigidly repressed ; and yet at the first note of danger the sap of imagination rose within me, and I pictured all sorts of dangers, that were, like other products of imagination, destined to be realized in due course of time.

For imagination is only the reflex of things which have been, or the precursor of things which are to be. Looking back, it is plain to me now, that unwittingly I began that morning to untwist one of the tangled skeins of life.

Which may all seem high and mighty language to apply to the days of one's earlier girlhood ; and yet nevertheless it is true, true as sickness, true as death, that I then contemplated face to

face, and not on my own account, life's mystery for the first time.

What if grannie should be mortally ill, and die? I pictured in my own mind the darkened house, the parlour full of people clad in black, the something lying still and rigid with clasped hands and eyes closed, never to open again in this world; and worse than all, the long lonely afterwards—the mornings and the mid-days and the evenings without grannie, who loved me; and as I contemplated scene after scene of the panorama myself had painted, the whole thing seemed so real that, unable to endure the mocking sunlight and the intolerable solitude, I rushed into the house, and climbing up to the highest shelf of our parlour cupboard, took down the family Bible, which would, I knew, give me some reliable information concerning my grandmother's age.

She was not quite nineteen when she went to be the mistress of Motfield's farm, and therefore, once I found the date of her marriage, the matter became a question of addition.

There was the entry; made in a stiff, plain, yet withal crabbed hand, with ink which had scarcely faded through all the years of the time that had passed since then:

‘Anne Boyson and Isaac Motfield, married the 16th day of August 17—.’

Forty-five summers previously. To my youth what an eternity it seemed! Forty-five and nineteen made sixty-four. She was not quite sixty-four. Once some one told me about a man who lived to be a hundred and twenty; *ergo*, my grandmother might still reign over her little territory for fifty-six years longer.

I breathed more freely. I wiped my eyes, I closed the family Bible, and gave it a hug ere replacing it on that topmost shelf of safety and honour. I had mounted on the seat of one of our old-fashioned chairs, in order to put it back carefully, when there came a tap-tapping at the window, which almost caused me to drop the book; and looking round, I beheld Miss Cleeves arrayed in her habit and plumed brigand hat, rapping on the pane with her gold-handled whip, in order to attract my attention.

Never was vision more welcome. She looked the very embodiment of health and help.

I ran to the front door to meet her, crying as I opened it—
‘Oh, Miss Cleeves, I am so glad to see you !’

‘Are you glad really, little woman ?’ she said, taking me in her arms and kissing me. ‘I would not disturb you till you had finished your devotions. Do you generally perform your morning exercises out of that huge volume ?’

‘Don’t laugh about things, please—not now,’ I entreated ; ‘grannie is very ill.’

‘What is the matter with her ?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Good heavens ! then why don’t you send for somebody who will know ? I declare, Annie Trenet, you have been crying ; your eyes are red and moist, and your cheeks flushed and moist also. Tell me what is the matter with Mrs Motfield this instant, you little stupid.’

Thus exhorted, I repeated my former answer—I did not know, and I said so.

‘At least you can tell me of what she complains.’

If one did not answer Miss Cleeves’ first question to her satisfaction, she at once assumed the air of a cross-examining counsel. After a fashion, she put one on oath, and then compelled a reply to it, ‘by virtue of that oath.’ It is a blessing I had nothing to conceal in those days, or I should, in Miss Cleeves’ opinion, have committed perjury over and over again.

‘She got a chill on Sunday night,’ I began ; ‘she complained of feeling ill all day yesterday. She had some gruel—’

‘Pah !’ interjected Miss Cleeves.

‘And could not sleep last night, and asked me early this morning to get her a glass of cold water.’

‘And I should not be in the least surprised if you have been crying your eyes out ever since, thinking she must be going to die. You foolish little Trenet ! people do not die so easily as that comes to, more especially a strong hearty old lady like Mrs Motfield. Make your mind easy about her, and if you cannot,

take my advice and send for the doctor. I called to ask if you would walk up with me this afternoon so far as the falls ; but now, of course, I won't say another word about it. Good-bye. I shall send down this evening to know how your patient is ;' and putting her foot in the groom's' hand, she was in her saddle before I could answer. 'Good-bye, *au revoir*,' she said, turning her head, and kissing her hand as her horse with an impatient snort, started off full speed for home.

How pretty and graceful she looked ! I can see the lines of her slight figure, the flow of her riding-skirt, the feathers in her hat, the gauntleted gloves, the tight trim linen collar, the red geranium fastened coquettishly in the front of her jacket, as plainly as I saw it that autumn morning.

Youth is so suitable to some people, it is a pity they should ever grow old.

After her departure I went up-stairs to ask if my grandmother would like a cup of tea. She said yes ; but still complained of illness.

'If I am not better in an hour's time, Annie,' she remarked, 'I should like some one to go for the doctor. I do not want a cold to settle down upon me at the beginning of the winter.'

'Had not Jack better go at once?' I ventured to ask ; and as no negative came, I sent him.

After that I sat down and wrote to my Uncle Isaac, telling him of his mother's illness, and stating I would not send my letter till I knew what the doctor thought of it.

What the doctor thought was ominous enough. He said that she had inflammation of the lungs.

Whether this was really the case or not is scarcely a question for me to decide. My own present impression is, she was not so ill then as he imagined ; that whilst his treatment for a complaint of his own imagination brought her to the brink of the grave, the good things that came from the Great House during the course of her illness helped to restore her to strength. But in those days I accepted the doctor's opinion as final ; and when Miss Cleeves remarked, 'Inflammation ! fiddle-de-dee !' I almost expected a judgment to follow her irreverence.

What a time that was, though ! Up-stairs lay the sufferer it had fallen to my lot to nurse—imperfectly it might be, but still to the best of my ability ; whilst day after day her sons and their wives, and daughters and their husbands, kept coming and going, grumbling at and interfering with every household arrangement ; requiring meals at unexpected and unreasonable hours ; emptying our modest larder ; criticizing our management, and making me wild with vexation because they seemed to think me little better than a cumberer of the ground. All of them except Uncle Isaac, who boldly took my part and said—

‘ Annie is worth a dozen of some grown-up folks I could name ; and for my part I feel quite easy at leaving my mother in her hands—that is, if the nursing be not too much for her.’

‘ Oh no, indeed it is not ! ’ I broke in ; ‘ I would do anything— ’ But here Mrs Daniel interposed.

‘ Oh yes, we know all about that. According to your own account you are a miracle of unselfishness ; but in my opinion you are a sly, underhanded cat, turning and twisting people who do not know you round your fingers. Look at your ingratitude to your poor dear aunt at Fairport ; ah, there is nothing sharper than a serpent’s tooth— ’

‘ It seems to me,’ interposed my uncle, ‘ that you are extremely unjust to Annie. What injury has the girl done to you or yours, that you should fly out on her like that ? ’

‘ Done ! ’ repeated Mrs Daniel, in a tone of supreme contempt.

‘ It is not my “ doing,” but my “ being,” uncle, which offends everybody,’ I exclaimed.

No matter what those present thought of me, I could not have kept back those words. After uttering them I went out of the room and the house, through the garden, and away to the extreme verge of the paddock, where, flinging myself on the grass, I cried till I could cry no more.

There Miss Cleeves found me. ‘ Little Trenet,’ she said, ‘ get up ; look at me—speak.’ And when I would not obey her bidding, she sat down on the grass beside where I lay, and taking me in her arms as she might have done a child, said—

‘Poor little woman, have they vexed you? Never mind; once Mrs Motfield is well again, all will be well with you too.’

And then I crept close to her with a sort of dumb appeal, and we two remained there in solemn silence for full five minutes.

‘I think I am a great baby,’ was my first observation.

‘I am sure you are,’ Miss Cleeves agreed with amiable alacrity; but she stroked my hair and patted my cheeks caressingly nevertheless.

What a time that was! what an amount of responsibility seemed suddenly thrown on my shoulders! How old I felt when, after having been up nearly all the night, I crept to bed, leaving Mary to take my place! How I blessed the minister’s wife for coming up one evening when I felt quite worn out, and saying—

‘Annie, this is getting too much for you. I will sit with Mrs Motfield whilst you have a sound sleep.’

How gratefully I stored up the memory of every kind word which was spoken! How I dreaded the visits of our relatives! How I rejoiced when, in dog and market-carts and other vehicles, generally borrowed, they departed!

It came to an end at last. Before Christmas—thanks, as I have previously suggested, to the delicacies provided by the ladies at the Great House, who stopped their carriage at our gate three times, and sent on each occasion a footman to inquire how Mrs Motfield was—my grandmother, aged considerably by her illness, but still, comparatively speaking, well again, came down-stairs to her accustomed seat in our little parlour, and by slow degrees we fell into the old routine again.

One by one she picked up the threads dropped months before; little by little she resumed her wonted avocations; life presented its interests to her again; and save that the Bible lay open on the little table more frequently than formerly, and that we both seemed to have added some years to our age, there was no outward change to be noted in our existence. And yet I was conscious of an alteration in myself; I felt weary of the place, weary of my home, my occupations, my fancies.

I had shot up during those months spent in a sick room

and outgrown, so people suggested, my strength. Perhaps physical weakness had some share in the depression and misery I felt; but I fancy mental sickness had more part in it than bodily illness.

Day was a toil to me and night a dread. Frost and snow, the Love rushing on in its winter might and strength to the sea, the early snowdrops, the budding crocuses, the first sights and sounds of spring—I had lost my love and relish for them all.

We found plenty to talk about, grannie and I, in the evenings over the fire; but the talk had no savour—the salt was gone, and the taste even of the most astounding fact insipid to me.

What was it to me that many of the ornaments wherein my heart once rejoiced were, when we came to consider ornaments again, nowhere to be found? I could not work myself up to a fitting state of indignation when we discoursed concerning a missing cream-jug, and a couple of china bowls. If I could only have been assured that Mrs Daniel and Mrs Isaac Motfield would never enter the house again, if a bond had been possible whereby all the Motfields great and little, save and excepting my Uncle Isaac, might have bound themselves severally and collectively to keep away from Lovedale, the whole of the valuables I possessed should have gone to them without a word.

I hated my relatives as only very, very young people can hate—impotently, instinctively, totally. I hated to think of them, to utter their names, or to hear their names uttered. I had seen them during the course of that illness mentally naked, so to speak.

I had seen their greed, their sordid grasping, their envy and jealousy and uncharitableness. I had seen not, who could do and who give up most, but who could take all and do least. I had heard their bickerings and borne their taunts. I knew they grudged me the belongings that were mine of right, and to which they had not the remotest shadow of a claim. I was made to feel that in winning my grandmother's affections I had inflicted a wrong on them.

Cold were they, cold and worldly—men and women who

valued money and plenishings, linen, plate, and clothing, very high ; who walked uprightly and respectably in the eye of the world ; who were better, in their own opinion and that of their neighbours, than many publicans ; and whom even I, with all my detestation of their ways and words and thoughts and habits, could not call sinners.

I know now their hearts, puffed up by success, were hard as the nether millstone ; but I only knew then that, as I have said, I hated them with a hatred impossible to express in language.

For the first time in my memory, the sight of the primroses springing up on the sides of mossy banks, or showing their faces amongst the beech-leaves that last autumn's winds had strewed upon the ground, brought no feeling of gladness to me.

I walked about Lovedale listless and tired. The only thing I really longed for was a sight of the sea ; but even if Mrs Isaac would have had me at her house, I felt I could never bring myself to enter it again.

She and the rest of my kindred had shown me what tender mercies I might expect if I were left to their care. They had never believed my grandmother would recover, and they consequently, certain of the game, showed their hands too openly, as events proved.

Fortunately those were not days in which women of all ranks wielded the pen with the fatal facility of modern years, or I know not what epistles of wrath might not have been despatched from our cottage to those who had left it laden with spoil like the Israelites of old.

As matters stood, we talked of our losses between ourselves ; but I could not evince that interest in the subject which it would have aroused twelve months previously.

Often my grandmother would put down her knitting, and, after looking at me over her spectacles, exclaim—

‘I wonder what has come to you, child.’

To which my invariable reply was—

‘I am sure I don’t know, grannie.’

Shortly before Christmas Miss Cleeves had left Lovedale in order to pay a visit to her mother and her mother’s relatives, the

Dacres ; so that our life flowed on literally without a break of any kind, except such as was supplied by a couple of letters written to me by that young lady from Dacres Park.

They were lively epistles, and it was kind of her to write ; but I put them away, after they had been duly conned over by both of us, with a sense of depression which caused my grandmother to remark, that I did not seem to be glad to hear from Miss Cleeves ; ‘ though there are few young ladies in her rank who would take the trouble of writing to you all the way from London,’ she finished.

‘ Miss Cleeves is very kind,’ was my answer, ‘ but I wish she would let me alone.’

Could my grandmother have read my heart, she would have understood how intolerable the difference of rank between Miss Cleeves and myself had become. I was fit to associate with no one, I thought over and over again bitterly enough.

For my own people and my own relations, I did not care. What were their interests and likings to me ? what were my interests and likings to them ? On the other hand, how could I, Farmer Motfield’s grandchild, ever expect to be regarded as an equal by one of the Wiffordes ?

I had little education ; of their ways I knew nothing ; I was ignorant of their customs as of the rules of court etiquette. By turns Miss Cleeves petted and snubbed me, but she had been kind, so kind, during my grandmother’s illness, that my heart clung to her with the same sort of gratitude a dog feels to some one who has been good to him.

It was spring again, and in her latest letter she announced her intention of returning to the Great House ; ‘ where,’ she proceeded, ‘ my aunts, considering that I am in many respects still unworthy of the great dignity they have thrust upon me, propose that I shall have the inestimable advantage of a companion, able at once to direct my studies and improve my deportment. Fancy this ! as if life at Lovedale had not been sufficiently insupportable before.

‘ Miss Cleeves does not seem very grateful for all the Misses Wifforde’s kindness,’ observed my grandmother.

'Perhaps she does not think it kindness,' I answered, hastily.

'Young people are not always the best judges of what *is* kindness,' was the comment on this remark.

'Nor old people either,' rose to my lips ; but I did not utter so saucy a reply. I put aside my work, and looked out at the sunshine ; and saying I thought I should like a walk, went into the woods, already fragrant with wild hyacinths, and white with anemones.

By the time I returned, it was the hour at which we invariably took tea ; but to my astonishment the tray had not been brought in, and I beheld no sign of preparation for it.

Close by the window sat my grandmother, her hands clasped idly in her lap, her face graver and sadder than usual, her eyes scanning every flower in the garden, and steadfastly refusing to meet mine.

'Annie dear, Miss Wifforde wants to see you. She left a message for you to go up to the Great House at once. There is no need for you to change your dress ; you can go as you are.'

'What have I done ? what is wrong ? what does she want ?' I asked.

'There is nothing wrong, so far as I know,' answered my grandmother, 'and I hope you never will do anything to offend Miss Wifforde ; and as to what she wants, why, you can't hear unless you go to her ; so the sooner you go the better.'

There was a sharp irritability about the tone of this reply, different from my grandmother's usual quiet manner, and it struck me so forcibly, that I could not help saying—

'Are you angry with me, grannie, for anything ?'

'Bless the child, no ! Why should I be angry with you or anybody else ? But run away now, or you will be walking in at their dinner-time.'

Without another word I did as she told me, except that, instead of running, I walked slowly all the way.

A woman opened the gates for me, and said, 'Good afternoon, Miss,' precisely as though I had a right to pass through them. When I arrived at the front door, the butler who answered my modest knock immediately allowed me to enter,

and addressing Miss Hunter, who happened at the moment to be ascending the steps alluded to in a former chapter, stated briefly, 'Miss Trenet is come.'

To my great astonishment my lady's lady did not come forward to shake hands with me, as had been her wont during the course of the previous summer, when my grandmother and I chanced to encounter her on our way to chapel.

She only said, 'Please follow me ;' and I followed accordingly.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS WIFFORDE MANŒUVRES.

THE only time I had ever previously entered the Great House was when enticed into it by Miss Cleeves ; but my guide did not on the present occasion lead me along the gallery I so well remembered.

Looking back at intervals to see I did not get lost by the way, she conducted me up a broad staircase, then across a wide landing, and so into a passage, ², the extreme end of which she stopped and knocked softly at the door.

'Come in,' said a voice I knew belonged to Miss Wifforde ; and Miss Hunter entered, leaving me outside.

'It is Miss Trenet, if you please, ma'am,' I heard her announce ; and then Miss Wifforde replied—

'Send her to me, and—you need not wait, Hunter ; I will ring when I require anything.'

'My mistress will see you,' remarked the maid, who had, I thought, an inimical expression on her face ; and she shut the door after me as if the room were a trap and the lock a spring.

Whatever it might be that Miss Wifforde had to say to me, I was bound to listen to it now.

There was nothing formidable, however, in the lady's manner

Seeing that I hesitated to come forward, she motioned me to do so, and touching my hand with the tips of her fingers, said, 'How do you do, my dear?' with much condescension and intended cordiality of demeanour.

'My dear' replied she was quite well, believing an answer to be expected, though she has since had reason to doubt the fact.

'Sit down,' went on Miss Wifforde, graciously pointing to a chair placed opposite to the windows; and I sat down, as in duty bound.

The truth is, I was for the moment bewildered, not merely by the frightful circumstance of finding myself *tête-à-tête* with Miss Wifforde, but also by the unwonted magnificence of her dressing-room.

Draperies, laces, old cabinets, inlaid tables, mirrors reflecting back the landscape, glasses in which I could see Miss Wifforde and myself reproduced at full length—these were some of the wonders I beheld.

Hitherto, the finest furniture of this description it had fallen to my lot to contemplate was contained in Mrs Isaac Motfield's bed-chamber. Item, one four-post bedstead, upholstered in stiff crimson moreen, trimmed with black velvet, window-curtains and valances to match; mahogany washstand, ditto towel-horse; ditto wardrobe; ditto dressing-table and glass; three ditto chairs, original covering unknown, second covering, white dimity; large arm-chair, ditto ditto; Brussels carpet, hideous, with rug to match; bronze fender, steel fire-irons. Ornaments on chimney-piece: china shepherdesses and Paul Pry; a ditto sheep and dog, both couchant; a pair of very much soiled fire-screens. Above the chimney-piece, a portrait of Mrs Isaac's mother, badly executed, and much cracked, in a frame that stood greatly in need of regilding.

In comparison with our humble belongings, this apartment was luxury itself; but in comparison with the splendour surrounding me in Miss Wifforde's dressing-room, Mrs Isaac's best bed-chamber hid its diminished head.

I was dreadfully frightened, as much, I may honestly say,

by reason of the furniture as of Miss Wifforde, who began the conversation thus—

‘I have some cause to believe that you are older in years than a stranger might imagine from your extremely childish appearance’ (I winced at this remark), ‘and that you are, from the peculiar circumstances of your bringing up, older in mind even than in years.’

Having arrived at which point, Miss Wifforde poured scent on her handkerchief, applied it to her brow, and commenced fanning herself, which were proceedings strange to my experience.

‘For both of which reasons I have decided to talk to you about your future. Have you ever thought of it?’

The question was abrupt, and took me by surprise, ‘for both of which reasons,’ to quote Miss Wifforde, I answered vaguely—

‘No, ma’am—that is, not much.’

‘Not much,’ she repeated, with that smile which only a woman in her rank knows how to smile.

Thinking of it all, I have a sort of momentary sympathy with those who rebel against centuries of cultivation.

‘Not much—but how much?’ I wonder why it is that the upper ten always unconsciously touch the French idiom when they are not dealing quite frankly with you, and know it.

Most of my readers have been, it may fairly be presumed, present at a cross-examination or subject to one. I felt just then as the poor wretch does who, after giving what he believes is truthful evidence, has to set his face to the opposing counsel, whose business it is to prove he has been telling lies. I was in for my cross-examination by a lady, and here it is :

‘Not much, but how much?’ was the question ; and just as I might have answered Mr Serjeant So-and-so, I replied desperately—

‘While my grandmother was ill, I wondered what would become of me if she was never to get any better.’

‘I understand,’ said Miss Wifforde, ‘and then——’

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am.’

‘What did you think after that?’

‘I thought nothing, ma’am.’

‘And have thought nothing since?’ This was interrogatory.

‘My grandmother is well now, ma’am, and there is no need to think.’

Since that hour I have heard of people getting checkmated unexpectedly, but I never saw such an evidence of it.

Miss Wifforde sat silent a few minutes, then she said—

‘You are young and I am old, and the experience of the old is, that what has happened before may happen again; at any future time Mrs Motfield may fall ill once more, and it is possible I—we—may not be at hand to help you.’

I rose up; I was appalled. Here was death—a dual death—close at hand suggested in a single sentence.

‘Oh, Miss Wifforde!’ I cried, ‘do not talk like that, please don’t!’

And I stretched out my hands to entreat her pity—all in vain.

‘My child,’ she began—from that hour I always detested and distrusted people who called me ‘my child’ or ‘my dear,’ or indeed, to condense matter, ‘my anything’—‘I trust your grandmother has many, many years of life before her. She has a wonderfully strong constitution, and her habits have been simple and regular, but still—’ At this point Miss Wifforde abruptly broke off her sentence, and after a moment’s pause began another.

‘I told you I meant to talk to you about your future. There is no necessity for Mrs Motfield’s life or death to enter into the question. Sit down again, my dear. Our conversation has somehow drifted into an unpleasant subject, but we must try to forget that, and speak for the future of nothing excepting what is agreeable. I have been thinking much about you since that Sunday evening when we first met, and it seems to me a pity you should not receive such an education as might enable you to make your way in the world, no matter in what circumstances you may chance hereafter to be placed.’

I grasped the sense of this remark, but not its drift, and so remained silent, although Miss Wifforde evidently expected some reply.

‘As a rule,’ she recommenced, ‘I am not an advocate for highly cultivating the intellect of—’ ‘the lower classes’ I know now she meant in her heart, but she really said, ‘those who are not likely to have sufficient leisure in after life to enjoy the fruits of such early teaching; but there is no rule without an exception, and, as I said before, I think it is a pity you should not receive a thoroughly sound education. You would like to know as much as other girls of your age, I suppose?’ she added, finding that unless she put a direct question it was vain to hope for any answer.

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘But there seems no chance of your ever learning much here.’ I shook my head mournfully.

‘Music now, for instance,’ she suggested. ‘You would like to become an accomplished pianist, to be taught singing——’

‘It would vex grannie,’ I murmured.

‘I think not,’ was the reply. ‘Indeed, I am sure not. Mrs Motfield is much too sensible to allow prejudice to blind her in a matter where your interests are concerned; and if she saw that you could receive good instruction at a reasonable price, there can be no question but that she would only be too glad for you to be put in the way of taking advantage of it. Now near Fairport there are two ladies for whom I have the highest esteem, who take a limited number of pupils. Their establishment is less like a school than a home. You would have every opportunity there of obtaining a thoroughly sound education, and of acquiring such accomplishments as you may wish to gain. I have already mentioned the matter to Miss Brundall, and she is quite willing to receive you on equal terms with her other boarders, and at a cost which Mrs Motfield can afford. Should you like that?’

‘Like it! Oh, ma’am.’

I could not say another word, my heart was too full for speech. Miss Brundall’s was *the* school of Fairport—of the whole county, in fact. At it attended professors who had come all the way from London. A real French governess lived in the house; the young ladies sat in a great square pew at St Stephen’s

Church. Miss Brundall's school was as much exalted above that at which my cousins were being educated as—as the Great House was above our cottage. Miss Cleeves herself could not have desired greater advantages than were now offered to me. Like it! My face showed whether I did or not; and Miss Wifforde read its expression correctly.

'I am glad you are pleased,' she said, evidently gratified at my delight; 'I thought you would be. So the matter is settled. I shall ask Mrs Motfield to let me provide your wardrobe.'

I had forgotten Grannie—forgotten everything except the prospect of change, of beholding the sea once more, of being able to learn such things as Miss Cleeves had laughed at the idea of my not knowing. I had raised up a fairy palace for myself, and in a moment it was level with the earth.

'If you please, ma'am,' I said, 'I do not think my grandmother would like me to go to Miss Brundall's. I can't tell you how much obliged I am, but——'

'Stop a moment, child! What if the question be left for you to decide?'

'I do not know what you mean?' was my stupid reply.

'I mean this: I saw Mrs Motfield this afternoon. I told her what I have told you. I pointed out to her other advantages likely to ensue from such a step, which you would be scarcely able to comprehend at present, and her reply was, "I will leave it entirely to Annie. If you and she settle that she is to go, she shall go. It must be altogether as she chooses." There is an unheard-of amount of confidence to place in a little woman no older than you are!' added Miss Wifforde, with a well-meant attempt at sprightliness. 'So you see the decision rests with you, and none other.'

I did not answer for a little while; then I said—

'Grannie would be so lonely without me.'

'No doubt; but mothers are lonely when they send their children to school, and yet they send them nevertheless. Mrs Motfield is quite satisfied that it would be a good thing in every way for you to accept Miss Brundall's offer. You are not strong. You have been mopish and dull lately, she tells me.'

You ought to be amongst other young people ; you want change of air and scene and occupation. Besides, you have been in the habit of staying at Fairport, and Mrs Motfield has gladly spared you to do so. You will be able to come home frequently, and tell all you have learnt and been busy about. I shall write to Miss Brundall to-night, and tell her it is settled.'

What was I to say ? what could I say ? To me the prospect was alluring, and Miss Wifforde had evidently won my grandmother's consent.

I could only thank Miss Wifforde once again ; I could only, the interview being virtually over, rise, and after going through that farce of hand-shaking, which it pleased the lady to perform, make my way out of the house, escorted to the hall-door by Hunter, who had been duly rung for in order to see me safely along the corridors and down that wonderful flight of stairs.

I should have shaken hands with her at parting had she permitted me to forget my new dignity so far. Instead of noticing my intention, she drew back ; and making a little frigid and slightly satirical curtsey, she said, 'Good afternoon, Miss Trenet,' with an emphasis on the last two words which really made me feel ashamed of my name.

After all, it was not my fault that Miss Wifforde had taken notice of me ; and greatly elated with my prospects, though with a certain consciousness that there was a drawback somewhere, I walked down the avenue and through the gates, and home along the sandy road, thinking as I went—thinking, I grieve to say, with an ever-increasing happiness—of how pleased I should be to go to school, and see Fairport once more.

As Miss Wifforde had truly said, I did want change of air and scene and occupation, and the very idea of change seemed to raise my spirits. Besides, socially I felt uplifted. My cousins could look down on me no longer, if I were once an inmate of Miss Brundall's school. No Motfield in his wildest dreams would ever have contemplated asking for the admission of a daughter into that select establishment. I should learn—Oh, what should I not learn ! I should be able to play and sing ; I

would study hard and become a good French scholar ; I would try to carry myself like Miss Cleeves ; I would make grannie proud of me ; I would bring back with me to the cottage news enough to fill it full from parlour to attic ; I would send such long, long letters home ! Castle after castle I built in the air as I sauntered along, enjoying as I had not done for months before the sights and sounds of nature.

Soft was the turf under my tread ; green were the elm-trees in the Wifforde woods ; calm was the distant landscape, lying still and quiet in the evening light. My heart was full of joy. It did not hold a care or a thought of care as I unlatched the little gate, and walked round to the back door, as was the custom when the front one did not stand ajar.

‘I think the mistress is asleep,’ remarked our abigail, who met me on the threshold.

‘I won’t disturb her,’ was my answer ; and I entered the parlour so softly that she never woke.

She sat in her accustomed easy-chair, her head resting against the back, her face turned slightly towards the window. I wonder how it happened that the expression of it should have struck me then, as it had never struck me before ! To the end of my life I shall not be able exactly to define what I thought and felt during that moment, while I stood looking at the worn sad face, at the lonely figure, at the thin hand which hung over one arm of the chair, at the gray hair smoothly braided under her widow’s cap. I could see plainly that she had been crying. There were the traces of tears on her cheeks. There came even in her sleep now and then a little quiver of the eyelids and a tremor at the corners of her mouth that I could not bear to look at.

Where were my air-castles now ? where the dream I had so lately pictured as a reality ? By some sort of intuition I felt that if I went away I should break her heart ; that she had left it to me to decide, because she would not in her utter unselfishness let her wishes or pleasures do violence to mine. In the expression of that changed face, which could not in slumber mask itself with a fictitious brightness, there was a meaning I

was then too young to grasp. All I understood was, that I could not go away ; that if I could help it she should never know I had wished even for a moment to go away.

I never gave myself a second for deliberation. More rapidly than I had built my house I razed it to the ground ; out of the room I slipped as quietly as I had entered it.

'I am going out again for a few minutes, Mary,' I said, as I passed through the kitchen ; 'I shall be back by the time granie wakes ;' and, that the click of the garden gate might not arouse her, I went along the paddock, jumped over the low hedge into the road, and then how I did run ! I do not think a greyhound could have reached the gates of the Wifforde domain much quicker than I did that evening.

'You are out of breath, Miss,' said the woman who had let me out so short a time before.

'Yes,' I answered, 'I have been running. I want to see Miss Wifforde before—before they sit down to dinner.'

'The first bell has not rung yet,' she remarked.

'What is the first bell ?' was my inquiry.

'It rings half-an-hour before the dinner-bell ; you need not hurry up to the house, you have plenty of time.'

And thus assured I slackened speed, even pausing now and then in order to recover my breath. There was no need for haste. I did not want to say anything then I should not be ready to repeat on the morrow. I had quite made up my mind. I was not afraid of speaking to Miss Wifforde now. I had settled upon the very words I should use. I hoped I should see her all alone in that same room where I had accepted her offer ; but whether I saw her alone or not, or in the same room or not, I determined I would try not to be stupid, but tell her I could not go to Fairport, that I would give it all up.

As I was about to knock, Mr Sylvester came and spoke to me. He was very kind ; asked me how I was, and hoped Mrs Motfield's health was perfectly re-established, and then inquired if I wished to see his aunt.

By this time he had turned the handle of the hall door, and when I answered in the affirmative he ushered me into a small

morning room, where, after ringing the bell, he stood talking till a footman appeared, when he said—

‘Inquire if Miss Wifforde can see Miss Trenet,’ and then continued talking, principally about his cousin.

How still the house seemed ! What a contrast his quiet self-possession to the flurry and flutter of my own manner ! How I envied Hunter her stately composure when she came to announce that Miss Wifforde would be pleased to see me in her dressing-room, and then preceded me in dignified silence along those passages which were becoming almost familiar !

That Hunter hated me I felt confident, though why she did so I could only vaguely imagine; and my courage was not increased by the wordless hostility of her manner.

She did not knock at her mistress’s door on this occasion, but, opening it wide, announced ‘Miss Trenet,’ and then closed it behind me, not waiting to be told to go.

The half-hour since I left Miss Wifforde had been sufficient to produce a metamorphosis in the apartment and in her. The blinds were pulled down and the curtains drawn across the windows. Wax-candles stood lighted on the chimney-piece and dressing-table, and were reflected from every mirror on the walls.

A jewel-case stood open, and I could see stones that almost dazzled me they were so bright, and gold bracelets, and chains, and rings. As for Miss Wifforde herself, she stood before the toilet-glass fastening a diamond brooch into a mass of soft net that covered her neck and shoulders, and she looked altogether so like my idea of a queen, that I remained with my lips parted when she turned towards me.

The sight is just as present to my eyes now as it was then. Trailing over the light carpet I see her ruby - coloured train trimmed with the richest lace ; flashing amongst the velvet and lace that composed her head-dress was a spray of diamonds; her fingers, as she busied herself with the brooch, seemed to my imagination glittering with gems.

There was a dinner-party that evening at the Great House, though I did not then know it. Notables from ten and twelve miles distant were at that moment driving along various roads

leading towards Lovedale. Decked out in lace and jewels that had been heirlooms for generations in the Wifforde family stood the eldest of 'our ladies,' ready to sweep down the staircase into the drawing-room and receive her guests; and there, in a dress which I had outgrown, in a second-best pelisse, in a last year's bonnet, stood I, Annie Trenet, beside a mirror that reflected back every detail of my shabby costume.

'I did not expect to see you again this evening,' remarked Miss Wifforde, finding I remained as silent as though turned into stone.

Then, as if the sound of her voice had broken some spell, I began. How I ever uttered the words I came to speak I cannot tell, but they were spoken. It seemed to me that somebody else, not myself, was talking a long way off; the rush of the Love was in my ears, there came a mist before my eyes; and then in a moment it cleared away, and the rush of the waters ceased, and I heard my own tongue saying—

'I cannot go to Fairport; I cannot leave my grandmother.'

'What folly is this, child?' and she put her hand open upon the table as she turned and looked angrily at me. 'Have you gone crazy, or has Mrs Motfield, to treat me with such an utter want of respect?'

'I cannot leave her,' I repeated. 'I will not. She was asleep when I got home, and if you had only seen how she looked, indeed, ma'am, you would forgive me.'

'I do forgive you,' she answered, putting her passion aside, and with an evident effort resuming her natural manner; 'that is to say, I will forgive you on one condition—namely, that I hear no more of this nonsense. Now go,' she added, 'for our guests may arrive at any moment.' And she was on her way to the bell-rope when I stopped her.

'Oh, Miss Wifforde, please, please do not be angry. You said it was to be left for me to decide, and I have decided. I cannot go; I could not leave her.'

'Be kind enough to remove your hand from my dress,' said Miss Wifforde. In my excitement I had seized her skirt, and when I released my hold, she shook the silk as though shaking

off the taint of some loathsome reptile. 'Now listen to me,' she went on. 'You must go to school, whether you please or whether you do not please, and I will tell you why. We cannot have Miss Cleeves back here until you are away. We are willing and wishful to advance your prospects in life, to give you the means of supporting yourself hereafter; but we are determined that for the future our niece shall be debarred from an association which is as injurious to you as it is derogatory to her.'

I stepped back as if she had struck me. She was so indignant at the bare idea of having her plans frustrated, that she never paused to weigh her words, or to consider how deeply they might cut. I had taken her by surprise, and in turn she had taken me.

After all, temper makes most people for the moment wonderfully alike. I could not have believed it possible for one of 'our ladies' so nearly to resemble Mrs Isaac Motfield as Miss Wifforde did in her manner at that moment.

'You understand me,' she said, with a haughty gesture and disdainful turn of her head, that I had often noticed in Miss Cleeves, 'distinctly?'

'Yes,' was my reply, 'but I shall not leave my grandmother.'

'Then you and your grandmother must leave Lovedale, and you can tell her I say so.'

I waited for no more, but escaped from the room, tears of rage and mortification and terror blinding me. In my fright I ran up against Miss Hunter, whom I believe to have been listening outside; but without waiting to apologize, or even thinking of such a thing, I sped on, along the passage, down the staircase, across the hall, through the door, which happily stood wide open, and so out into the twilight. Through my tears I saw the lamps of many carriages, as they came slowly up the drive, but I never paused to look at the people those carriages contained. My own concerns were all-sufficient for me, and I was half way home before I remembered that I should frighten my grandmother to death if I appeared before her with red cheeks and eyes swollen by crying.

A little brook rippled across the common, and flowed beneath the road, and I knelt down on the grass beside it, and bathed my face with the cold water till I imagined it must look like my own again.

As I entered the kitchen, however, I was undeceived.

‘Lord sake, Miss Annie, what have you been doing to yourself? You look as if you had seen a ghost. You are as white as a sheet, and all of a tremble.’

‘I am cold,’ was all the reply I vouchsafed, walking on towards the parlour, rubbing my cheeks the while, to put fresh colour into them.

My grandmother was awake.

‘Where have you been, Annie, this long, long time?’ she asked.

‘At the Great House.’

‘But you came in from there an hour ago, Mary told me.’

‘I went back again; I had forgotten something.’

She went on making the tea, and I stood beside the table, knowing I must sooner or later tell her what had passed, and yet not having the slightest idea how I should do it. After waiting for a little, she paved the way for me herself.

‘Did you see Miss Wifforde, Annie?’

‘Yes, I saw her,’ was my reply.

‘And what did you and she settle?’—this slowly, and after a pause.

‘We settled nothing,’ I answered. ‘Miss Wifforde said I should go to school, and I said I should not; that I could not and would not leave you.’

She caught me to her heart with a great sob of relief.

‘Oh, Nannie, I was so afraid!’ she whispered; and then she loosened her clasp, and holding me from her at arm’s length, asked what Miss Wifforde said then.

‘Miss Wifforde said then,’ I repeated, ‘that you and I must leave Lovedale together, and that I could tell you so.’

For a moment she seemed like one stunned; then she said—

‘Well, if we must, we must; we shall go together, at any rate.’

We did not talk much after that. We both sat silent for a long time, thinking each in her own fashion—my grandmother no doubt retracing the past, I busy with the present. Had I tried, I could not then have repeated Miss Wifforde's words ; the very memory of them seemed to choke me.

I did not deserve them, I knew that. I had not asked Miss Cleeves to speak to me. I had never set myself up as a fit companion for her. I would have kept out of her way, if she would have kept out of mine. I had not been disrespectful to Miss Wifforde ; I had a right to stay with my grandmother if I wished to stay with her, and she wished me to do so.'

Vaguely I understood the unreasonable pride, the intense selfishness, the detestable despotism, that underlay Miss Wifforde's proposition. I was a something to be got out of the way, peaceably if possible ; but when I would not go peaceably she showed that she meant to drive me off with contumely and reproach.

I sat in our little room, chafing in silence over the recollection of the cruel interview, wondering if the woman I had seen in so terrible a rage could really be the same who rebuked Miss Cleeves for her lack of courtesy.

I hated Miss Wifforde as much as I feared her. Mentally I called her every evil name my poor vocabulary of abuse contained ; I ascribed to her every sin I knew of ; I wished I had it in my power to do her harm ; I thought I should like to hear of her being ill and in sorrow ; but through all my tortuous meditations I kept one clear idea before me—I would not tell my grandmother what Miss Wifforde had said. For the first time I resolved to keep a secret from her.

At length we went to bed, both of us sad at heart, and yet both of us glad, because we had learnt how dear each was to the other.

All the night long I kept tossing from side to side—now dozing, now dreaming, now starting, never sleeping soundly—so that, when morning dawned, my head was aching so badly, that I could not lift it from the pillow ; and I lay on hour after hour, waiting for that sleep which would, my grandmother declared, make me quite well.

At last it came. The cooing of the pigeons, the prating of the hens, the cawing of the crows, and the bleating of the lambs first mixed and mingled together, and then were heard no more.

How long that slumber lasted I cannot tell. I only know I awoke with a confused sense of some one standing by my bedside, and opening my eyes, I beheld Miss Wifforde !

‘Lie still,’ she said, laying her hand on my shoulder as I was starting up. ‘I have come to beg your pardon. I was wrong yesterday evening. Will you forgive me?’

‘Oh, Miss Wifforde !’ I cried, ‘I will do anything you like, if you only let grannie stay here, and me with her.’

CHAPTER XV.

WE LEAVE LOVEDALE.

No sentence passed all day between me and my grandmother concerning Miss Wifforde’s visit. That lady and she had, so I afterwards ascertained, been closeted together for full half-an-hour before the former appeared at my bedside. I know now that in her magnanimous confession to me of wrong-doing, Miss Wifforde shot the last arrow her quiver held ; but not even that arrow touched my grandmother’s heart.

She was respectful. What Motfield had ever failed in due respect to a Wifforde ? She was sorry—the ties and associations of over sixty years cannot be severed without a pang—but when her visitor tried to reopen the question of education, so far as it concerned me, Mrs Motfield stopped her.

‘I have been thinking over what you said yesterday, ma’am,’ she began quietly ; ‘and although I have never thought that in our station much book-learning was needed to fit a girl to be a good wife and mother, still no old-fashioned notions of mine shall stand between Annie and her education.’

'I am very glad to hear you have arrived at that decision,' answered Miss Wifforde. 'Though, indeed, I expected nothing less, from so sensible a woman as yourself.'

'But,' proceeded my grandmother, unmollified by this compliment, 'the more I think about your very kind offer, the less I think Annie ought to be allowed to accept it, even if she wished to accept it, which I am thankful to say she does not——'

'She did wish it up to a certain point,' interrupted Miss Wifforde. 'She left me full of pleasure and gratitude one hour, and returned the next, to say she could not leave you. Her whole proceeding was so strange and ridiculous, that I confess I lost my temper, and made some observations that I now exceedingly regret, and for which I beg to apologize.'

'No need for that, ma'am,' replied my grandmother; 'only you must let me say—hoping no offence—that I think there is nothing strange or ridiculous in a girl wanting to stay with a person who has filled a mother's place to her. I am old and homely, I know, Miss Wifforde; but I believe if Annie were a young lady, and had thousands a year, she would love me all the same.'

Here my grandmother broke down, a lump in her throat stopping farther utterance; and here came Miss Wifforde's opportunity. The likes and dislikes, the affections and hatreds of the 'lower orders,' were matters to which she had never paid the slightest attention; in which, indeed, to put the fact plainly, she had very slight faith. And therefore, taking advantage of this momentary weakness, she harked back to her original position, and commenced once more a fluent recital of all the advantages—moral, physical, social, and educational—which must infallibly ensue from a few years' residence at Miss Brundall's select establishment for young ladies.

It was the same story which had once deceived my grandmother, repeated in a different form; but this time it had no power to delude her understanding.

Well enough she comprehended it was from no love of me Miss Wifforde desired that advancement, social and moral, of which she had spoken. Although my tongue failed to reveal

the mystery to her, she understood that 'our ladies' wanted to be rid of a girl they considered dangerous.

Poor people are not always so incomprehensive as great folks think them.

They can be, if they choose, demonstrative to an extent, but they can also be obtuse to an equal degree.

No marvel that Miss Wifforde, who had been always accustomed to the cry and subservience of the poor who live by begging, did not in the smallest degree comprehend the proud humility, the haughty reticence of a nature that, having found itself once seduced by specious words, had with one effort torn itself free from the tempter for ever.

Very patiently she allowed Miss Wifforde to recite her parable, then she said—

' You are very kind, ma'am, and I thank you most sincerely ; but if it would do Miss Cleeves harm to associate with my granddaughter, it would do harm to the other young ladies (like Miss Cleeves) at Miss Brundall's ; and I do not want to hurt any one. I know, ma'am,' she went on, ' what you would say—that Annie there would be in a different position to what she is here ; but I could not have my child looked upon anywhere as a dependent without a dependent's wages.'

' Your views have changed materially since yesterday afternoon,' remarked Miss Wifforde.

' You did not give me time to think yesterday,' was the reply. ' I did not quite understand what it all meant, and I was afraid of letting my selfishness spoil Annie's future. When she came home last night, with her face as white as death, and her eyes swelled with crying, and told me we should have to leave this place, I could guess without another word from her within a little of what had happened.'

' But you could not seriously imagine I meant what I said,' exclaimed Miss Wifforde.

There ensued an awkward pause. On the one hand, my grandmother had still too much respect for her visitor to retort that she believed Miss Wifforde had uttered every word of her threat in terrible earnest at the time it was spoken ; on the other,

she was not a woman to tell a falsehood in the interests of politeness. Accordingly, she adopted a third course, and evading direct reply, said quietly—

‘At any rate, ma’am, I intend to leave this place. When in your goodness you and your sister consented to let me end my days here, you could never have thought that what has come to pass was likely. I do not want to be a trouble to you, ma’am, or to let Annie be a trouble either, and so we will go. It may seem a little hard at first to make a new home at my time of life, still I am not afraid but that what is best for my grandchild I shall feel is best for me too.’

Then at last Miss Wifforde was touched. She could not choose to be other than affected at the idea of an old woman, who had lived all her days in Lovedale, grown to its soil like a tree, whose memories were centred in the place, whose dead lay mouldering in its churchyard, going forth to a strange place among a strange people, for no cause or reason except that a little girl had come between the wind and her nobility.

Almost with tears she implored my grandmother to do nothing hastily. Without for a moment attempting to conceal that Miss Cleeves’ partiality for me had caused serious annoyance to herself and her sister, still she declared they would rather the intimacy continued than that Mrs Motfield should leave the neighbourhood.

‘Nothing,’ she said emphatically, ‘could give me such pain as your going away.’ And I believe she only spoke the truth. She had a dread of the real cause of our departure becoming known. She feared the comments which might be made on the fact, that not all her authority had prevailed to keep Miss Cleeves from associating with the grandchild of old Farmer Motfield. She would have given, I doubt not, a thousand pounds cheerfully at that moment to have been rid of me; but to be rid of me, with the chance of social exposure of the whole of the circumstances supervening, was more than her equanimity could endure.

The longer she spoke, the more pressing she became. She said she would appeal to Miss Cleeves’ good sense and good feel-

ing. She promised to be a friend to me always. She declared she was really fond of me, and that my attachment to my grandmother had sensibly touched her. She offered that Miss Cleeves' masters should, at her own cost, attend at the cottage to give me lessons. She signified her desire to present me with a pianoforte. Never before had a Wifforde so pleaded to an inferior, but she might as well have held her peace.

My grandmother was obstinate, after the fashion of her age and class. After a struggle, in which she had uprooted all old associations, all cherished memories, her mind was made up as to the expediency of leaving Lovedale.

The happiness of her home was destroyed. Could she, at the bidding of this woman—Wifforde though she might be—tell Peace to dwell there ever again? Her feelings had been outraged, her pride insulted, her independence attacked. Could she forget these things, and, seated at her window, look up at the Great House calmly and admiringly as before?

No; as well might one who, in a fit of fury, had torn up the flowers in some fair garden, tell the owner to replant the withered roots, and make the desert blossom again as of yore.

She could not recall her threat; she could not unsay her words. In her passion she had come down from her pedestal, and in my grandmother's eyes she could never occupy it again.

In the watches of the night, the woman she had so bitterly grieved decided there was but one course for her to pursue; and having decided, not all the Wiffordes who had dwelt at the Great House since time immemorial might have altered her determination.

As a last resource, Miss Wifforde bethought herself of making up friends with me; and, confident in her own strength of will, my grandmother offered no objection to her desire. She only said—

‘I have not yet told Annie that I mean to leave Lovedale. Please, ma’am, not to mention it.’ And only too pleased at the tidings, Miss Wifforde promised discretion.

Perhaps I was more ill than she expected to find me. Perhaps the interview just ended had really, as she said, touched

her. No doubt she was very genuinely sorry for the threat she had used towards me ; at all events Miss Wifferde, so far as manner went, was tenderness itself.

‘Poor little girl,’ she said, in answer to my sentence chronicled at the end of the last chapter, ‘have you been fretting yourself about my thoughtless and unkind speech ? Child, I would not drive a cat from its accustomed hearth ; and do you think that, even were it in our power to be so cruel—which it is not, for Mrs Motfield had our promise that she should live here always—my sister or I would break up the home of a person for whom we entertain so high an esteem as we do for your grandmother ? Keep yourself quiet, and when you are quite well again we will see whether we cannot manage to have you taught music at all events without leaving Lovedale.’ Then, and she smoothed the sheet over me and kissed my forehead and patted my shoulder, just as she might if I had been about five years of age, ‘Good-bye, my dear,’ she finished, ‘and get rid of your headache.’

Then, as she passed out of the room, I heard her whisper to my grandmother, ‘You noticed what she said ?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ was the stiff reply ; ‘Annie is very fond of Lovedale.’

That same evening, without my knowledge, a letter was despatched to Mr Isaac Motfield, Parade, Fairport, which after stating that it left the writer in good health—and trusting it would find himself and his wife and their children in the same—proceeded to set forth his mother’s desire to have some talk with him on business. She did not, in so many words, request him to come unaccompanied by Mrs Isaac ; but no one who read the epistle could have failed to see that he would be more welcome alone than otherwise.

For which reason, Mr Isaac Motfield, to whom the postman handed this letter across the counter, never said a word about it to his wife, but took an opportunity of saying to her, that one of his customers, who was going to Uptons, a farm some six miles from Lovedale, had offered him a seat, and that as there was not much doing, he thought he would take the opportunity of running over to see his mother.

‘I wish you could have taken Tommy,’ suggested Mrs Isaac; ‘the poor child wants a change sadly; I cannot think what is the matter with him.’

‘He never could walk from Uptons to Lovedale,’ answered her husband.

‘Well, you might tell grandmamma that he is very ailing, and perhaps she will ask him to spend a few days at the cottage,’ said Mrs Isaac, who considered that life could hold no greater pleasure for any human being than the society of her progeny.

In justice to my uncle, I may here mention that the facts of Tommy’s indisposition, and that his mother thought a change of air might prove beneficial, were duly mentioned, without, however, eliciting the desired invitation.

In truth, my grandmother’s mind was at the moment occupied by much more important matters than Tommy’s fit of indigestion. It was no small resolution she had taken; it was no light work she was about to put in hand. Never shall I forget the astonishment depicted in my uncle’s face when first she mentioned her intention of leaving Lovedale.

We were seated round the little tea-table, which was covered with many dainties in honour of our guest. We had so few visitors that we did not know how to make enough of one when we got him. It was a lovely evening, and the windows of the Great House seemed all ablaze in the light of the setting sun.

Not a sound broke the stillness. Not a cow was lowing or sheep bleating. The very pigeons were quiet. Not a creature was stirring on the road, and the general silence seemed to have communicated itself to us, for we drank our tea and ate our toast almost without exchanging a word, until my uncle said—

‘Well, mother, and what is this weighty business concerning which you wish to talk to me? I suppose Nannie knows all about it, as she does about everything else?’ and he laughed as he laid his hand on my hair and stroked it kindly.

‘Annie knows nothing about it yet,’ she answered; ‘but there is no reason why she should not be told now. I mean, Isaac, to leave Lovedale.’

‘Oh, no, grannie,’ I cried; ‘no, no, no.’ Whilst my uncle,

about to help himself to another portion of cold ham, dropped his carving knife and fork with a great clatter, and looked at his mother as though he really believed she had lost her senses.

‘Yes, Annie ; yes, Isaac,’ she said, in answer to my remonstrance and his astonishment. ‘Sit down, Annie, and do not make yourself ill again.’ This to me specially, for I had risen in my despair and stood wringing my hands, and crying out, ‘It is all my fault ; it is all my doing.’

‘You hear what your grandmother says,’ remarked my uncle. ‘Be a good girl, and do as she bids you. Now, mother,’ he added, ‘please go on. You took my breath away for the moment, but I have got it again. What is the English of what you said just now ?’

‘The English is precisely what I said. I mean to leave Lovedale.’

‘And how long have you come to that determination ?’

‘Only the night before last ; but I wonder I never arrived at it before, seeing it is the only thing to do.’

‘Why is it the only thing to do ? and why is it necessary to do anything ?’

‘Because Annie and I have agreed not to part company ; and if she ever is to be educated in the way people seem to think she ought, it is high time we left Lovedale.’

‘So it has come to this at last,’ said my uncle, pushing his plate from him, and plunging his hands deep into his pockets, whilst I began to exclaim that I never wanted to learn anything more ; that I would rather be a dunce all my life than leave Lovedale.

Across this lamentation my uncle cut ruthlessly. “

‘Be quiet, Nannie,’ he said, more sharply than I ever remember hearing him speak to me before. ‘This is not a matter for you to decide. It is not a question of liking or disliking. It is what will be best. Mother,’ he went on, turning to her, with a jealous quiver in his voice, ‘how fond you are of this child, fonder than you ever were of one of us !’

‘Don’t say that, Isaac,’ she answered ; ‘remember all I had in those times, while now——’

‘You have but the one ewe lamb,’ he finished, ‘and I don’t grudge the love you bear it.’

‘No, you need not,’ she replied; ‘for my age would have been very lonely without Annie. But finish your tea, my son,’ she went on. ‘And, Annie, when you have done yours, run away for half-an-hour. I want to have a quiet talk with your uncle.’

‘I cannot eat anything more, grannie, thank you,’ I answered; and after putting my chair back against the wall, as it was the rule to do in our methodical and unfashionable abode, I left the room.

Before I entered it again the business on which my grandmother had summoned her son to Lovedale was finally settled.

We were to leave the cottage; we were to go to that vague and far-away home where my father had died, and which had now been vacant for nearly twelve months.

My uncle was strongly of opinion that, considering the circumstances under which the Misses Wifforde had first offered his mother the free tenancy of our cottage for life, it would only be equitable for them to allow her to sub-let it, or give her such an amount annually, or in a lump sum, as might compensate her for its loss.

‘Say what you will,’ he remarked in my hearing, ‘it is the people at the Great House who have brought this change about, and it is quite right they should pay for the indulgence of their whims, not as a matter of favour but of justice, and I shall see Miss Wifforde on the subject.’

To this proposal my grandmother made no objection. Whatever her feelings may have been, she was not a woman to allow sentiment to elbow prudence out of any question she chanced to be considering.

For many years afterwards my own conviction was, that rather than have accepted a shilling from one of the Wiffordes, I would have cheerfully begged my bread.

Experience, however, modifies a vast number of convictions

that young people are apt to think unchangeable, and I see no reason now to doubt the soundness of my uncle's judgment.

The Misses Wifforde, after vainly attempting to change the decision at which mother and son had arrived, frankly acknowledged the righteousness of my uncle's claim. They would have been more than just—generous—had he accepted their first offer ; but he wanted and would take nothing beyond what he considered fair ; and so it was ultimately settled that the cottage should be taken off our hands, that Mrs Motfield should be paid twenty pounds a year for life, and that if she wished to dispose of her small farming-stock by private contract, they would take it off her hands at a valuation.

When all this was arranged, and my uncle about to take his leave, Miss Laura Wifforde hinted a hope that the reasons which had no doubt largely influenced Mrs Motfield's decision would be kept in the background.

' You may rely upon our discretion, madam,' answered my uncle, who was quick enough of apprehension ; and then both of our ladies were graciously pleased to thank him very much, and they condescended to offer him a jewelled hand apiece, which he had no alternative but to take, looking, I doubt not, very much confused and ashamed the while ; and so he came away, and we were discreet to an extent.

Not from us did any one ever hear the true cause of that hurried removal ; not to the wife of his bosom did Isaac Motfield whisper the real truth ; but yet within a month from the time of our departure the whole countryside knew that Widow Motfield had left her cottage because the Misses Wifforde could not keep Miss Cleeves and Annie Trenet—Farmer Motfield's granddaughter—apart.

Miss Cleeves was not long in forming her conclusions when she came back to the Great House and found the humble nest it looked down on empty ; neither was she reticent in expressing her opinions on the subject.

No entreaties or commands could tie her tongue ; and I have since had reason to believe that the Misses Wifforde would not

have objected to quadruple the modest annuity they paid my grandmother could they only have put things as they were before, and restored to their cottage its former tenant, who was to see Lovedale no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAM MORRISON'S VERDICT.

IT was all over. The old home was empty ; we were trying to get accustomed to the new.

How other people may feel, I do not know ; but to me nothing seems so difficult as to break the associations connected with, and to forget the memories that have gathered about, a place where one has lived for years.

On unwonted hearths the fires never seem to blaze the same welcome as of yore ; in unaccustomed rooms the household gods look strange and unfamiliar. The attempt to make ourselves at home in a new house is like trying to gaze with favour on the face of one woman, while the heart is sick because of the love it still bears for another. So at all events we found the experiment ; and though we tried to seem cheerful, I know the struggle was at first severe.

Cowslip's pasture in the trimly fenced paddock was richer than she had ever tasted at Lovedale, and yet the creature could not make herself content, but kept lowing at each corner of the field, as though a calf had been unjustly abducted from her ; knee-deep in straw was our pony's stall, well-filled his rack and manger, nevertheless he persisted in whinnying for the well-remembered stable in which his youth was spent ; mutely our dog, aged and almost blind, would lick our hands at intervals, as though in sympathizing recognition of a trouble and a change he was too old perfectly to understand ; whilst Jill went about her work in depressed and solemn silence ; and Jack whistled no

more of those airs for the performance of which he had once been famous.

The only creature about the place, biped or quadruped, who seemed perfectly happy, was our cat.

People talk about cats being attached to place ; for my own part I do not think place is in the smallest degree material to them, if they can only lie roasting themselves in front of a good fire, if they have an abundant supply of milk, and ample opportunities for thieving. Our cat, at all events, accommodated herself to circumstances with a sweet serenity. When the sun was shining, she basked in his beams ; when the wind blew chilly, she ensconced herself beside the best fire, wherever that fire happened to be. In the confusion of unpacking, numberless chances of annexing provisions occurred, and altogether my lady waxed fat, and went about in a rich sleek coat, whilst all the rest of us were trying to reconcile ourselves to the change as best we might.

But, of course, this state of mind could not last for ever ; and accordingly, after a time, we ceased to think so much of the picturesque beauty of the Love, and addressed ourselves to consider the calm sweetness of the stream that strayed through the village where we had made our new home. In my heart I believe my grandmother really compassed more enjoyment of life in that village than she ever did in the dear cottage we had left, and to this hour it comforts me to think so.

At Little Alford she was somebody : at Lovedale she was at best Farmer Motfield's widow, an appenage of the Great House. At Little Alford she was in some sort a relative of the (reputedly) rich old lady who had lived, for forty years, or thereabouts, in the house we took to, covered all over with ivy and roses and wisteria and magnolia.

And it would be vain to deny that my grandmother liked and appreciated this consideration. Never in my memory had she exhibited herself in such spruce attire, in such snowy white caps and belongings, in such preternaturally black dresses.

She visited, and she received visitors ; she left more of the domestic management to Jill than I could have imagined con-

sistent with her ideas of economy ; she still rose early, but not so early as formerly ; she still looked closely after household affairs, but they did not bound the whole of her horizon, as had been the case at Lovedale.

In her old age she took the recreation of which her younger and middle life had been so destitute. Is there no enjoyment, do you imagine, ye juveniles, for those whose cheeks are worn and furrowed ? On the contrary, with competent means and modest wishes, that, it seems to me, is the happiest life-period of all. It is babyhood without its helplessness ; youth without its restless aspirations. The ceaseless cares and the desperate struggles of an older stage are past and forgotten, like the memory of a tempest on the sea. Over smooth waters the storm-tossed vessel glides peacefully into the last port she shall ever enter ; and let the first part of the voyage have been what it liked, the latter is calm and pleasant.

It was so with my grandmother, at all events, God be thanked ! There came a time when we could talk of Lovedale to each other without a break in our voices ; there came a time when, other interests supervening, we rarely spake of Lovedale at all.

At first I seldom went to sleep without being awakened by the dream-sound of plashing water and cawing rooks ; but eventually even that link between me and my past broke altogether.

Yes ; we were both very happy at Alford. By the time Cowslip had settled to her pasture, and our pony become reconciled to his stall, we were at home in our new abode. It was a larger house than that just left ; but our ideas had grown also. Even although it was all her own doing, had my grandmother lamented over Lovedale, after she had left the place, a shadow of sorrow must have rested upon me. As it is, I shall never think of those latter years save as years of pleasantness. I can never feel other than grateful for the sort of warning I received not to separate my lot from hers.

Apart we were in some things, apart far as the Poles ; but then, which two amongst us, friends, are quite of one mind ? On

this, however, we were agreed—we loved each other with a love deep, lasting, unselfish ; and how much of my grandmother's new serenity was due to the pleasant society of Alford, and how much to the fact which was gradually dawning upon her understanding, that I should not eventually have to be a comparative pauper if I did not secure an eligible *parti*, I shall never comprehend thoroughly here. All I know is, she seemed a different woman. After a time she not merely tolerated the sound of a secondhand piano, with which a judicious professor had furnished me, reserving to himself the usual commission, but actually grew to like its tones.

She never complained of the hours I devoted to practice, of the mode in which I pored over French verbs and essayed to make acquaintance with the sweet Italian tongue.

At Great Alford, two miles distant from our home, there was a school as famous in its way as that of the Misses Brundall, and thither three days a week, blow high, blow low, sunshine, rain, snow, or hail, I trudged regularly. Two miles—what was that to a girl of my habits ? Two miles along lanes overarched by elm-trees ; two miles between hedges laden with cob-nuts ; two miles along white frosty roads ; two miles with yellow primroses and budding thorn marking the way. Stories had I of my schoolfellows to bring back to our new abode ; something always to report of what I had seen on the road to and from Great Alford. It was altogether a new, but to us a picturesque and pleasant life ; full, in a small way, of people, and interest and incident. The greatest trouble I knew was that my voice grew suddenly weak, and I was counselled not to attempt to sing much at a time.

‘ Miss Trenet is growing fast, and she is delicate,’ remarked the lady who taught *Do-Re-Mi* to such pupils at Alford House as paid extra for the attention ; ‘ and in consequence her vocal organs are not strong.’

Considering that I was extremely short for my age, and that I scarcely knew the meaning of ache or pain, Madam Morrison's conclusions may safely have been declared drawn from insufficient premises.

Indeed, she knew as little about physiology as about music, which is saying a great deal.

All this happened many, many months after our removal to Alford. With that reticence which belongs, I think, to the possession of any gift, I was chary of saying I could sing.

Authors, as a rule, keep the secret of their first book as carefully as a girl does that of her first love—and in like manner it was a trial to me to speak of my gift at all.

The world has since acknowledged I had a gift; and therefore I may now speak of the matter with the same want of reticence as obtains in biographies; but I felt diffident and modest about the matter then, and had a reluctance to show my treasure.

For which reason many months elapsed after we left Lovendale before the question of my having or not having a voice was raised at Alford House. And the way in which it came to be raised at all was this: Uncle Isaac, in one of his pleasant letters, said—

‘I am glad to hear Nannie gets on so well in French, but you say nothing about her singing. How is this?’

How, indeed! I had been glad enough to put that matter on one side, whilst my grandmother certainly could have wished it forgotten for ever.

But she entertained a certain respect for her son’s opinion, and remarked consequently—

‘Annie, you had better speak to Madam Morrison.’ And I did.

I told the principal of Alford House, with many blushes, that if I had a talent for singing, my friends wished me to cultivate it, and she repeating this statement to Madam Morrison, I was invited to sing something for the lady.

Never worse in my life did I sing; I can state that fact positively; and it did not therefore in the least surprise me to hear Madam Morrison simper—

‘A sweet voice, without much compass.’ And then Mrs Mitchell looked at me blandly through her double eye-glasses—I always notice how fond respectable and dull-brained women

are of mediocrity—whilst I, turning hot and cold, and red and white, in the same moment of time, and remembering how my song had once possessed power enough to compel the very linnets to stop and listen, was obliged to hold my peace, and look in silence at the light-haired idiotic woman, whose singing made me sick, and whose stupid incompetency I hated with an intensity worthy of a better cause.

I had been day pupil for a considerable time at Alford House when this little scene took place, and I had learned in the time to understand tolerably accurately the extent of Madam Morrison's musical knowledge, and the value of her critical opinion—still the faint praise with which she damned my vocal powers mortified me bitterly.

The praise of a wise man may fail to give pleasure, but the censure even of a fool never fails to cause pain ; and as I walked back to Little Alford I felt that this world was not a nice place in which to live, and that Mrs Mitchell's select establishment was an especially disagreeable corner of it.

All in vain I tried to console my self-love, and flatter it back into confidence again.

All in vain I recalled the bitter cold of that immense room ; the out-of-tune condition of the grand piano, on which Madam persisted in playing an accompaniment, and playing it all wrong ; my own excited and nervous state of mind : my soul refused to be comforted.

In fancy I heard again the weak, reedy tones of my own voice ; I had failed signally, and I could not help mourning bitterly, as I thought over my fiasco. It seemed as terrible a matter to me as some great loss does to a merchant, or a scathing criticism to an author. I knew then, in my heart of hearts, that I had been proud of my voice—that I had been silently and secretly cherishing an idea of one day becoming a great singer. I understood suddenly precisely what I had long desired ; and I comprehended at the same time why I never dared to give expression to that desire even to myself. I had wanted to use my own talent, although the force of surrounding circumstances kept it hitherto hidden away ; and now, when there seemed a hope

of my wish being gratified, I was told there was no talent to put out at usury.

Practically, that was the opinion Madam Morrison expressed ; and though I did not believe in her judgment, still my faith in my own powers was so shaken, that I walked on humbled in spirit and sad at heart.

‘Whither away, Miss Annie?’ said some one close behind me, when I had worked myself up into a very paroxysm of despair. ‘See what it is to be young ; I am almost out of breath trying to overtake you ;’ and the doctor of Little Alford, one of the pleasantest and dearest of old bachelors, shook hands with me ; and then, looking sharply into my face, said—

‘ Been in disgrace, eh ?’

‘ No, sir,’ I answered.

‘ Then what is the matter ? what have you been fretting about ? If you spoil your eyes now, you will never be able to read without glasses when you come to be my age. That is right ; I like to see you laugh. Now tell me what the trouble was.’

I could not resist his kindly tones, his bright cheerful face, and told him my trouble, which seemed to become insignificantly small when laid out in words.

‘ Got no voice, Miss Annie, or next to none,’ he repeated, briskly ; ‘that may be or may not be ; at all events, we won’t accept Madam’s judgment as final. And so, you little puss, spite of your quiet demureness, you have been fancying you might some day become a second Catalini ? Well, we have our dreams. When I was a young fellow studying medicine, I made up my mind I would be Court Physician, and the greatest man in my profession ; and yet, you see, I am happy enough now, though only a country doctor, bound to listen patiently to the account of every old woman’s ailments. But we won’t despair of the voice, or of your being a great singer yet. By the way, how does it happen, if you are so given to carolling, that I have never heard you lift up your voice ; no, not even in church ?’

‘ I do not think my grandmother—that is—I mean, she may be afraid——’

‘ Afraid that the bird may not be content to stay all its life

in a cage,' he said, helping me out. ' Well, there is something of wisdom in her notion. We will have a little more chat on this subject again. Meantime, don't spoil your eyes. Come over and see us, as often as the French verbs and exercises leave sufficient leisure. My sister is always glad to have you. She says you are a good, quiet little girl; for my own part, after the revelation I have heard to-day, I am inclined to think you a small but very grievous hypocrite. Yes, you may laugh, but it is true. Good-bye, my embryo *prima donna*. I shall come to your benefit; remember that.'

And he went on his way across the village green, whilst I turned into our home and told my grandmother what Madam Morrison had said.

' It is very odd,' she remarked; but a sigh of relief escaped her even as she spoke. Almost unconsciously she had feared that, if I really possessed the gift of song, I might one day endeavour to turn it to account.

She would not have cared about my becoming a governess or a companion, or anything of that nature befitting my station and sex; but the very idea of my ever singing in public was a misery to her.

Of course, if I had no voice to speak about, that danger might be considered past. She would not mind my taking lessons, if it were impossible for me to make an improper use of the knowledge thus acquired. In her heart I believe she blessed Madam Morrison. She had never seen that lady, but as she was a teacher of singing, of course she must know whether or not I had any capabilities.

That was a happy evening for my grandmother, but she took care to conceal her exultation from me, as I took care to hide my disappointment from her.

With the first streak of daylight next morning I was out of bed. Before I fell asleep on the previous night, I had made up my mind as to what I should do; and accordingly before breakfast I walked a long way off, to a very solitary spot well known to me, where were no houses and no people.

There to myself, no one listening, I sung my trial song;

there, through the clear bright frosty air, I let my voice go free. I could still sing ; I was satisfied. I did not care now for Madam Morrison, or Madam Anybodyelse ; and I walked back to Little Alford as one might who treads enchanted ground.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY NEW FRIEND.

AN evening in the golden summer-tide ; that is the time. A long low room with French windows opening into a large garden ; that is the place. A lady, two gentlemen, and myself ; these are the actors ; and the question under consideration is an interesting one to me.

It may be summed up in the words Dr Packman has just addressed to his visitor, of whom I shall have more to say presently.

‘Well, Droigel, was I right or was I wrong ? Has our small friend a voice ? can she sing ?’

Herr Droigel, a large man, with an immense acreage of fat cheek, on which not even a vestige of whisker could have been discovered, first looked at me with slow blue unwinking critical eyes, and then turned his gaze on Dr Packman.

‘Miss has a voice, and Miss can sing,’ he answered, in solemn tones that implied more than they actually said.

‘Bravo !’ cried the Doctor. ‘Did not I say so, Dorothy ?’ (This to his sister.) ‘Did not I say, that bitterly cold afternoon, when, as I told you, I overtook Miss Annie, who had been crying, I believed there was something in our little neighbour ?’

‘Yes, Decimus, you did,’ agreed Miss Packman, who, like her brother, was a charming member of society. I thought so then. I have seen nothing in society to make me change my opinion since.

Very calmly Herr Droigel waited till brother and sister had

finishe'd their little duet, when he resumed, as though his previous sentence had been left incomplete.

‘But Miss will never make one grand success.’

‘And why not, pray?’ inquired the Doctor.

‘Why not! you ask, why not! and you a doctor! Look—see—judge for yourself.’

And he pointed an immense forefinger at my unfortunate person.

‘Well,’ said Dr Packman, ‘I look, I see, and I judge for myself. Why should she not be successful?’

‘Stop, stop, my friend!’ cried Herr Droigel. He pronounced stop ‘stope;’ but as no form of spelling could ever indicate his accent, I prefer translating his speech into English. ‘You run on too fast; you are so full of—what you call it?—mercury. You pick me up half way. I did not say Miss would not be successful; on the contrary, I only told you she would not be one great success.’

‘Do you mean that she is not tall enough?’ asked the Doctor, bewildered by distinctions that seemed to him to be without a difference. ‘She has plenty of time before her, and may develop for aught we can tell into a Siddons, as regards figure.’

‘Develop, pah!’ repeated the German, with an expression of intense disgust. ‘You may grow high, so much’ (indicating something seven feet or thereabouts), ‘and you may grow stout, so—like me’ (spreading out his arms until a fearful physical diameter was suggested); ‘but can you alter this?’ and he tapped his head, ‘or this?’ and laid his hand affectionately on his heart. ‘There is the artiste mind, there is the artiste body; mind or body, can you discover the artiste in this young lady with the divine voice?’

‘Artiste fiddle-de-dee!’ exclaimed the Doctor, contemptuously.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the other, pursuing his subject calmly, as though he were delivering a lecture; ‘it is not fiddle-de-dee; it is fact. Of some people in this world friends say they will plod along; they may earn, as your charming adage has it, “salt to their bread,” but no butter—no, no, no, not one scrape

of butter ; and yet in a few years they have climbed the tree of fame ; they are able to shake down apples for the less fortunate to pick up. Of others, friends say, "Oh, they will make one coup ; wherever they open the page, History will place her mark." And what happens ? you ask. Ach, himmel ! ' with an ineffable shrug. ' No coup comes, but a tumble, and History forgets to mark the page where their names are not recorded. Now, Doctor, attend ; now, Miss Annie, please to listen to an old man, an old man who has heard, oh, so many Miss Annies sing their little songs. If Miss Annie had the presence of a Cleopatra, if she had the genius of a Rachel, the grace and beauty of Grisi, the voice of an angel, she would never make one grand success. She will make, I trust, what is much better—herself a very happy woman. Some are born to be happy, and some to be great. For me, I think it is best for a woman to be happy, and not great. Oftentimes I say to my Gretchen, "Mein Gott, how I thank Thee this child has no gift !" Sometimes I am forced to think Gretchen is less satisfied with the arrangements of Heaven than her father,' he added reflectively, dropping his huge body into the furthermost recesses of an easy-chair.

' But, Herr Droigel,' I said, speaking for the first time in my own interest, blushing scarlet as I did so, and feeling the hot blood tingling to my fingers' ends, ' if I have a voice, and try to make the best of it, why should I not have a chance like others ? '

' Because, my goot child, you are not like others ; because you could never come to me and say, "I have one father and one mother ; I have sisters, I have brothers. I have said good-bye to them all ; I mean to make one great success. When I have made it, I will remember father and mother, brothers and sisters ; but till then Art is my father and mother, my home, my sisters, my brothers." Look, Doctor Packman,' he added, rising suddenly and turning me towards the light ; ' is that the brow of a woman who shall find her happiness before the scenes ? Should you wish those eyes ever from the footlights to scan the galleries ? Can you vision to your own imagining this child painted—powdered ? Pah ! Let us go into your churchyard

and dig a pit, and bury her deep and safe, before such misery come to pass. And yet what a voice she has!—sing again once more.'

There is a little Irish air, not so much known as it deserves, called, 'Cushla ma chree.'

In my very childish days I had heard it crooned by the wife of a man who came from the sister isle to seek work at the Great House.

She had a sickly infant, and in the noon-tide heat we let her sit under the shade of our elder-tree, and gave her food and drink; and often afterwards, during that harvest time, she begged leave, in her soft sweet tongue, to rest awhile, praying a blessing on my grandmother for her goodness.

Thus it came to pass I learned to hum the air with which she hushed her baby. Subsequently I found in an old book words that some unknown poet had wedded to the music, and it was this song I essayed when the Professor bade me sing for him once more.

I was nervous no longer. I threw my soul into the melody. Like everything else I had ever learned from ear, I could sing it with all the tenderness and feeling I was at that time capable of expressing. As I went on, there mixed with the story of the love song a vision of Lovedale—of the old forsaken home—of the days that could never come back. For the moment I was again looking on the familiar scenes—the elder-tree cast a shadow over the woman, her child, and myself—it was she who was singing, not I—and then it ended, and some one spoke.

'You shall be one ballad-singer,' the German said, rising and addressing me in a frenzy of broken English. 'I will take you—I will teach you—I will perfect that voice. You shall give yourself to me. Yes, I, Droigel, will present you to the world. You shall go with me to London—'

'No, oh no!' I interrupted.

'And wherefore "oh no?" Am I a monster? am I, as you say, nobegobelín? do you think I want to make one meal of you, Miss Annie? My dear, if you mean to do good with yourself, you must do what I tell you. It is one thing to sing pretty and

small and nice, to two, three people in a little parlour, and quite another to stand up, and with your own voice alone to fill one hall as much bigger as your church as I am as you.'

'But I do not want to stand up and sing in a large hall,' I began.

'Then why did my good friend Dr Packman say to me, "When next you come down to catch our trouts, there is one—",'

A look from the Doctor arrested Herr Droigel at this point, and an awkward silence would have ensued but for Miss Packman, who said—

'I think what Annie wants is to take a few lessons here.'

'A few lessons here!' repeated the Professor, lifting hands and eyes to heaven. 'Mein Gott! what will she want next? and who is to give those few lessons? That clever man who taught her to play the piano perhaps—taught her so!' and he went to the instrument and mimicked my performance, while Dr Packman shouted with laughter and I could have cried with rage.

'Or, perhaps,' proceeded Herr Droigel, 'that skeleton woman you were so good as to ask here once to spend one evening—I remember her. I have not forgotten—no;' and he spread out his wide coat-tails, curved his wrists well over the instrument, and after sounding a few chords, touching the notes as though they were hot, and burnt him, he began in a falsetto, which seemed doubly absurd emanating from such a mountain of flesh, so admirable an imitation of Madam Morrison's thready soprano, that the tears I had been keeping back on my own account, filled my eyes while laughing at the ridicule thus cast on her.

It is not easy, we all know, to be perfectly good-humoured when a snowball, judiciously aimed at the back of one's neck, makes a channel for its trickling stream between one's shoulder-blade and spinal column. Nevertheless, with what equanimity, not to say pleasure, we behold another bearing the same infliction.

'If not, then,' suddenly resumed Herr Droigel, stopping his musical performances and taking up the argument after his German

fashion precisely at the point where he had left it off—‘if not, then, the clever pianist or the sylph-like madam, who remains to teach Miss Annie? Who is there to give those “few lessons” your charming sister thinks it only needs to perfect the song of our young lady?’

‘We will consider and talk over the matter,’ said the Doctor, in a curiously absent manner. ‘Meantime, what do you say to a cigar?’

‘I say no,’ was the reply. ‘To a pipe among the roses, if Miss Packman thinks I can be of any service in killing her green flies, I say yes;’ and accordingly they both produced their pipes, and walked into the garden, where I saw them smoking gravely and talking earnestly for a full hour, whilst Miss Packman industriously braided a velvet cap she meant to present to the Professor, and I grounded a pair of slippers it was her intention should at some future period adorn her brother’s remarkably small feet.

According to our sexes, I consider we were all usefully and gracefully occupied.

When the gentlemen had finished their pipes and their conversation, it was time for me to tidily fold up my work and take my departure. Herr Droigel gallantly offered to see me safe across the green, and although I felt in his company like a cockle-shell boat in the wake of a seventy-four, still I was grateful to the large gentleman for his kindness, and tried to behave myself, as the nurses say, ‘prettily.’

But he was in no mood for prettiness of behaviour. From some cause which I could not in the slightest degree understand, he seemed to be immensely in earnest, and the moment we were outside the gate, commenced impressing upon me the importance of playing no tricks with my voice.

‘There is no one here who could teach you what would be good,’ he said; ‘and so our very good friend the Doctor and I have agreed you had better not learn at all. He tells me in his opinion you might be a degree stronger; do not sing much till you rise that degree; do not work too hard, you have years and years and years before you in which to work; but just now your first business is to be a little humming-bee, gathering honey, that

health. When you have laid in a good stock of that, then you shall sing; but do not sing, no not much now. You live, our dear Doctor says, with a grandmother—oh, so charming!—who loves you so much, whom you love so much. That is good; always love your grandmother. I had a grandmother once, whom I loved. I shall come and pay my respects to that delightful lady tomorrow, if she permit. Goot-night, Miss Annie. God bless you!' And he took my hand and held it in his immense palm a moment.

‘God bless you!’ he repeated, and dropped my hand; and went away across the green, but not in the direction of the Doctor’s house.

It is not an easy matter for any person, more especially for a young person, to repeat compliments that have, more or less judiciously, been paid during the course of an evening visit; and therefore all I had to tell my grandmother seemed to please her well. Herr Droigel counselled my singing little, and having no lessons at all.

Hearing this she said—

‘You are not disappointed, Annie?’

‘No,’ was my answer, ‘not at all.’ But like a little Jesuit I kept my reasons for not feeling disappointed to myself. Already I had learned the lesson that perfect frankness does not always add to the happiness and contentment of those with whom our lot is cast.

That night I slept in fairyland; the dreams of my life became in sleep its realities; and when I awoke they seemed almost realities still.

Bright grew my life, brighter and brighter as the weeks rolled on—for that dear Professor not merely threw out hints for my guidance while he stayed at Alford, but kept up a correspondence with me after his return to London, sending me now a few exercises written in the neatest of caligraphy, now a morsel of his own composition, sometimes a very simple song—‘suited to my years and abilities’—more frequently a chant or hymn.

His letters were a delight to my grandmother. I am afraid he was a dreadful hypocrite, and wrote them with a view of

pleasing her. He knew great people, and spoke of them and their doings with a covert satire which induced her to think—ah, how mistaken she was!—that he despised and disliked the fashionable world. He attended vast assemblies, and sent accounts of them to us more graphic than anything we ever read in the few papers that fell in our way.

And so the autumn passed, and winter came and went, and spring smiled on the earth once more, and summer was at hand again; and one Sunday evening, after we had returned from church (there was no chapel at Alford, and my grandmother, not being able to walk so far as formerly, and, farther, having made close acquaintance with the curate, had arrived at the conclusion that, so long as she heard the Gospel of Christ preached, it did not matter where she knelt in prayer), I sat at the piano, trying, before it passed out of my memory, to reproduce a new tune I had heard that night adapted to the words, ‘Nearer, my God, to Thee.’ After a short time I succeeded in picking out the melody, and then, improvising an accompaniment, I sang the hymn straight through.

‘That is nice, grannie, is it not?’ I said, when I ended.

She made no answer.

It was nothing unusual for her to fall asleep whilst I sang, so rising from the instrument, and walking quietly to one of the windows, I looked out across the green, which the moon was flooding with an almost unearthly light.

All at once the profound silence of the room struck me with a sort of horror, and hoping she would soon awaken, I turned towards the sleeper. Something in her attitude reminded me of that night when, coming from the Great House, I made up my mind I could never leave her.

Just as it had done then, her head leaned back against the chair, showing the thin worn cheeks, the lines of care, the marks traced by time and sorrow. Just as then, her hand hung over the arm listlessly, seeming almost powerless; but there was something more than this, or else the pale moonbeams falling across her face deceived me—something I had never seen before in any face.

‘ Grannie !’ I said.

There came no reply.

‘ Grannie !’ I repeated louder.

She would not waken. In an access of terror I threw my arms around her, but there was no answering caress.

What happened next ? When help came, I found myself standing in the middle of the carpet with the bell-rope in my hand.

After that there was an interval, when I felt as though I had fallen down a cliff and stunned myself, and was slowly recovering my senses. Then I heard people talking, and have a faint memory of being led out of the room and the house ; of passionately resisting the strength of some one stronger than I ; of being compelled to swallow something ; of sinking into a deep sleep, and waking up suddenly with a pang, in a strange bed in a strange house ; of crying out, ‘ Where am I ? Where am I ? What has happened ? ’ of hearing a voice broken by sobs answer, ‘ Oh, my dear ! ’ and then I understood.

I gave no one any trouble after that ; I turned my face to the wall, comprehending what had come to pass ; and though it was in another house, I lay alone till morning with my dead.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY BEREAVEMENT.

No matter how much people may differ in temperament and constitution, there is, I fancy, a wonderful similarity in the manner in which they spend the first twenty-four hours after some one near and dear has been taken from them.

Of course there are deaths and deaths. The miser crawls unwillingly from out his money-bags, and quits a world he has helped to cumber, leaving no one to lament his departure. The prodigal who comes after him dies ; and his boon companions

flee from the sight of a fate they would fain forget overtakes all who are born of woman. There is the death waited for by paid nurses, certified by the regular medical attendant, announced to the world generally in the obituary column, and to passers-by particularly, by closely-drawn blinds. There is the long-expected death, which has not come by years so soon as it might ; when the dinner-bell rings just the same as usual, and the inhabitants of the mansion eat and drink, and talk, and sleep, as they did before ; for the actual death which has come seems to them almost less terrible than the mockery of life, that for so long fought in a lonely upper chamber to preserve its own wretched existence. There are deaths which, even in the first hours that follow, survivors cannot regard other than as a relief and a blessing.

But these are the exceptions ; taking it as a rule, death deals a very hard blow to the survivors. They may recover from it soon, or bear traces of it to their graves ; they may weep over their loss passionately, or go about the usual affairs of life with dry eyes and stern set faces ; or they may wrap themselves up in a wordless anguish, to which God in His own good time alone can bring comfort. Still, with all these differences, no matter how the rue may be worn, the experience of the first twenty-four hours is the same to most people.

There is the shock of bereavement ; whether sudden or long expected, matters less than is generally supposed ; whether it comes 'so soon' or 'at last' makes little or no difference in the mystery at length revealed. To that shock follows the numbed incredulity of non-comprehension, a stupid, stubborn refusal to believe the worst, and then forgetfulness brought on by physical and mental exhaustion ; to which, in due time, succeeds the worst trial of all—the waking to daylight, to memory, to sorrow.

One gone who may never return ; one set sail across that ocean, the tide whereof is always ebbing, never flowing ; one departed from the old home, who may not re-enter its portals ; one less in the world, who was all the world to some loving heart ; one passed forth solitary on the dark lonely journey ; a voice silenced, eyes closed, heart stilled, pulses quiet.

And the birds sing, and the sun shines, and the flowers bloom, and the leaves dance in the morning breeze ; and the mourner rises to look forth upon the earth, which can never again seem quite the same earth as it did before the curse was thus made visible.

It had come. That wolf, whose gaunt wicked apparition I conjured up one morning in the old garden at Lovedale, had come when I least expected to see him, when nothing was farther from my thoughts than sorrow, or sickness, or death, and carried off all I loved in the world, all I had in the world to love me. :

When I woke from the sleep which towards morning visited me, I felt like a bankrupt in earthly hope and earthly affection. She was gone—no family Bible, no moss-grown tombstone, no average of three-score-and-ten or three-score-and-anything could give me comfort again ; one moment she was with me, the next she had departed.

In an early chapter I said I tried her as a duckling might a hen, and she tried me as a hen might a duckling ; nevertheless, the hen supplies a mother's place to the duckling, and grannie, dear dead grannie, had supplied that place to me.

I dressed myself in haste. Mine was a terrible face to see, as I caught sight of it in the glass, and I shrunk from its reflection as one instinctively retreats from something painful and unlovely—dishevelled hair, cheeks pale, with a crimson spot on the top of each, eyes sunken with weeping, lids swollen from the same cause ; a contrast, I wot, to the white quiet face lying upturned in our cottage, that I meant never to leave more till the coffin-lid closed over it.

Like one committing a crime, I stole from the house of those friends who had—meaning to be very kind—brought me away from her.

Not to seem ungrateful, I left a line on the dressing-table—telling them I must 'go back to grannie' was, I have since understood, the formula used—and this done I made my way into the open air, and speeding across the village green, soon reached our cottage, where Jack was milking Cowslip as if

nothing special had occurred, and Jill was sitting before a newly-kindled fire in the kitchen, weeping fit to break her heart, with her apron thrown over her head.

‘Betty’—that was the name of the then Jill of our establishment—‘Oh, Betty!’ I said; and then we sat down hand in hand, and cried together. Jill had lost a kind mistress, and I the only mother I could remember.

Dr Packman and his sister were very good to me at this juncture; they let me remain with the dead; and although Miss Packman spent most part of the days which succeeded at the cottage, she did not insist on bringing her bag and baggage also, and cumbering me and Jill in the first access of our grief with a visitor.

Betty and I had much of each other’s company at that crisis, and were the better for it. She brought a mattress into my room and slept there, and was ready with her tears when she heard me sobbing in the night.

There was no bitterness about my grief. If I had not done all for the dead that I might—and whose actions will in his own sight bear weighing in the scales at that supreme moment?—at all events I had been a comfort to grannie, and she loved me. The time spent at Alford had been a season of uninterrupted peace and happiness—at least, so it seemed to me; but I did not know, as I lay awake at night thinking over it all, that it had not been all happiness to her.

We none of us thoroughly understand the other. I comprehended later that she had kept all trouble from me so long as she could.

Sooner than I could have supposed it possible for him to arrive, my uncle Isaac knocked at the door, which I opened for him.

He was dressed all in black, and had precisely that look in his face which a man usually wears when, full of trouble himself, he thinks he will be called upon to comfort the trouble of others as well.

I do not know in what state he expected to find me, but he must have felt relieved at my meeting him; for his eyes bright-

ened in an instant, and the hard set expression about his mouth relaxed as he took my hand in his, and said only two words—
‘ Nannie, dear ! ’

That was all. I never spoke ; I could not speak. We went into the parlour together, and for full five minutes, I should say, he stood beside the window, although the blind was drawn down ; his hands plunged deep in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the carpet, silent as I was myself.

At the end of that time, which seemed like an hour to me, he turned and said—

‘ Where is she ? You needn’t come, only tell me.’ I had not far to take him, only across the hall ; for in our little drawing-room, where she died, they had laid her down in that sleep which might never on earth be broken. The furniture was arranged formally against the walls, the piano was closed, the ornaments piled up on a table in one corner, while in the centre were placed tressels, which supported a shell containing that he desired to see.

He entered, and I, closing the door, left the middle-aged man with his mother.

He stayed a long while with her. Who can tell what memories he recalled, what deeds he wished undone, what hours he would have given years of his existence to live over again, what prayers he uttered, what vows he made—alone then with God and the dead ! I only know that when at length he joined me his face was very white, and its expression sadder and sterner than any I had ever seen there before.

‘ Will you come out with me ? ’ he asked ; and I put on a bonnet and scarf, and we went away together into the cool dark woods, where the brook went trickling over the pebbles and gravel making a music like that of distant faëry bells.

‘ You have lost your best friend, Nannie,’ he began, after we had walked for some time in silence ; ‘ and I have lost mine. We must try to be good friends to one another.’

I could not answer him. His speech made my comprehension of the utter desolation that had come upon me, more vivid even than before.

‘ It was not unexpected to her,’ he went on. ‘ Before I came

to see you at Christmas, I knew that sooner or later I should receive just such a message as Dr Packman sent me on Monday. I had a letter from her so long back as last summer, which I brought over for you to read. It would grieve you to look at it now——'

‘No,’ I interrupted, stretching out my hand to take the familiar writing; ‘only first tell me why, if—if you knew, she kept it——’

‘Why she did not confide in you as well?’ he finished. ‘For this reason, dear: she did not wish your feet to be set in the Valley of the Shadow one hour before it was actually necessary.’

‘But I should like to have known,’ I said. ‘Oh, grannie, if you had only told me!’—and the tears so long repressed burst their bounds as I thought of all the hours I might have spent with her, of all I might have done for her, had I ever guessed there was danger approaching.

He let me cry for a space. He sat silent beside the stream, while I—hands flung wildly forward, face buried in the cool moss—sobbed as though my heart were breaking.

‘If you had been expecting this daily for a year,’ he said at last, speaking slowly and gently, ‘it would not have seemed one bit the less hard now. You were too young, Nannie, to have borne such knowledge, as we older people are forced to do, patiently. Life would have stood still for you in the expectation of death; ordinary duties would have been cast aside; the laughter my mother loved to hear would have echoed no longer; the step she liked to watch, so light and quick, would have grown slow and thoughtful; your pleasant talk would have had a constraint upon it; and instead of the memory of a year of happiness, you would now be looking back upon twelve months clouded by the anticipation of a trouble which was incapable of being averted by you or any other human being.’

‘But, oh, uncle, if I had only known!’ I repeated, my face still buried in the moss, now wet with scalding tears.

‘What could you have done, dear?’

Ay, that was the question—what could I have done—I, so feeble, so powerless, though I loved her so much?

‘Do you suppose, if any means had seemed likely to avail, I should have left those means untried?’

‘No,’ I murmured.

‘Then why should you wish to have known when you could have done nothing for her?’

I lifted up my face from the ground, and pushed back the hair that had fallen in tangled masses over my forehead. I could answer him now, for the vague impressions left by his first announcement had taken a definite shape at last.

‘If I had a great trouble,’ I replied, ‘I should not like to bear it all alone, even if no one could help me.’

The stream rippled on at our feet, the birds’ songs sounded overhead ; there ensued a pause, during which I could hear the melody of the stream, the chorus of the birds. Then my companion said softly—

‘When you have such a trouble as this, or a trouble greater, if that be possible, I trust that ONE, nearer and dearer even than little Annie was to her grandmother, will help you to bear it.’

And he took off his hat when he spoke, as though he had been in church.

It was an incongruous idea, and I hated my imagination for harbouring it at such a moment ; but I could not help wondering how a man like this had ever brought himself to marry his wife.

True, Mrs Isaac Motfield was not unaccustomed to religious musings and observations, but her remarks usually tended to the conclusion that the special Providence which directed the concerns of her and hers had either no time or no inclination to consider the affairs of other people.

Never, save in the cant of some utterly hypocritical time-server, did religion present a more repulsive aspect than when portrayed by the word-painting of Mrs Isaac Motfield. Vaguely, spite of my sorrow, the memory of some of the sentences I had heard that woman utter would recur to my mind, and at the same moment a question, which never ceased to trouble me for very long at a time, once again presented itself ; and in order to have it solved, I asked—

‘Where, uncle, will — the —’

‘I suppose you mean, dear, where shall we bury her?’ he said, as I stopped, not liking to pronounce the word. ‘If you read the letter I gave you, and I think it may be well for you to do so, that will tell you all.’

Saying which he rose and left me, while I perused that message from the dead.

At first the writing seemed dim and indistinct, by reason of the tears which welled up in my eyes and blinded me; but by degrees that control, learned in the calm unimpassioned school wherein all the lessons of my life had been conned, asserted itself, and I read her words, as I would have tried to listen to them if spoken on her deathbed, quietly.

After some commonplace sentences, touching a pecuniary remittance, domestic matters, and the health of her daughter-in-law and grandchildren, the letter proceeded:—

‘Now, my dear son, I have some bad news to tell, which I think it only right you should know. I have not, as I told you in my last, felt very well for some time, and so I determined to consult a medical man. He tells me—for I begged him to keep nothing back—that my heart is seriously affected, and that the mischief has been going on for years. I thank God for giving me so many* free from ache or pain, or knowledge of coming illness! Leading the quiet regular life I do, free from care, it is possible and probable, he says, that following certain rules, my life may be prolonged for a considerable time longer; on the other hand, a day, an hour, a minute may end it.

‘At first this seemed to me very terrible; but when I come to think it over, what more has the doctor said to me now than I have heard repeated every Sunday since I first went to the little chapel in Lovedale?

‘My days are not yet numbered, though one day more may find my place vacant; but the uncertainty of life, so far as I am concerned, has been put before me in a way I can never forget; and for this reason I want to put my house in order, so that when the hour strikes no worldly concerns may trouble me.

‘As soon as may be convenient, I should like you to come over, that I may tell you exactly what I have done; only re-

member, Annie must know nothing of all this. Trouble will come upon her soon enough without our making it for her. She has been the blessing of my old age, the light and life of a home which, but for her, must indeed have seemed dark and lonely.

‘I do not want her to shed a tear for me before the time actually comes. I want to see the sunshine on her young face until night closes over me. Isaac, you will be a father to that dear child. I don’t dictate where she shall live, what you shall do with her little money, how her education shall go on. I leave you her guardian—I leave her present and her future to God.

‘If I did not believe He would keep her from all harm I should fear sometimes for her happiness; and yet every day I feel more and more assured that, although her ways are not my ways, she will be kept from the evil, if not from trouble. The lady whose school she attends called here yesterday, and told me that if Annie ever should require to take a situation, she would be most happy to engage her as a junior teacher. This is an unspeakable relief to me, as it would at once give the poor dear a home and a chance of cheaply finishing her education.

‘Every one seems to like the child, though she is so shy before strangers. I pray she may always make good friends—I mean friends who will teach her nothing but what is right.

‘My dear son, this is a long letter for me to write. I have been two days about it already, and have not yet finished.

‘There are one or two things I still want to say: *whenever* I go and *wherever*, lay my body in the graveyard most convenient at the time.

‘You recollect when I left Lovedale my saying foolishly I should like to be buried beside your father. I have learned better since. He will be as near me if I rest under the turf here as if you put us side by side.

‘Concerning the little I have to leave, Annie has no part in it save in my love and gratitude. My own children are nearest in blood. Amongst them I have equally divided all the worldly goods I own, but I desire you to see that the money which came to Annie from her father is touched by no one save for her bene-

fit ; and I wish you to understand I have left a list of all the articles in the cottage which are her property, and oh, my son, be kind to this the only orphan we have in the family—in proportion to the charge shall be the reward. Some may, perhaps, think I have loved the child too much, but if you hear this said, remember all she has been to me.

‘Certainly I can declare since she was first put in my arms she has never wilfully caused me an anxious hour. If she is different from us all, the Almighty made her so. You first pointed this out to me. Remember *that* night, Isaac, when I am here no longer.’

There was more than this, more added at later dates, for the letter occupied a week in writing ; but I could read no farther then.

What had I lost ? what had I not lost ? In a great hurry, with a terrible tremor, I went in search of my uncle, whom I discovered not far distant.

‘Let us go home,’ I said ; ‘let us go home, please, now.’

‘Why home, Nannie ?’ he asked.

‘Because I want to be near her as long as I can,’ was my reply.

‘But you trust me, dear, don’t you ?’ he asked. ‘I will be all to you she asks, and more.’

By way of answer, I put my arms round his neck and kissed him, as I apprehend no child of his own had ever done before.

Then, hand clasped in hand, we retraced our steps, through the woods, across the green, to the silent darkened dwelling where she lay so still and quiet.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCERNING MY FUTURE.

THE next morning brought an influx of Motfields and other relations to that once peaceful home. People I had never seen before took possession of the house as though it belonged to them of right. People I had only vaguely heard of, asked if I was 'that girl,' and receiving an answer in the affirmative, shook their heads in grave disapproval of my existence and myself.

Mrs Daniel Motfield was there, but Mrs Isaac, having it in contemplation about that period to increase the population of Fairport, put in no appearance—to my exceeding comfort be it confessed.

Before the arrival of this goodly company, my Uncle Isaac, assisted by Dr Packman, occupied himself in putting away all plate, nicknacks, ornaments, papers, articles of wearing apparel, and so forth, in boxes, cupboards, and drawers, whereto seals were at once attached. Nothing movable, indeed, was left, save the general furniture, of which they took an inventory, and my own wearing apparel, which no one considered sufficiently valuable to put under lock and key.

'Nannie,' said my uncle to me on the morning of *that* day, 'you had better go over this morning to Miss Packman; she will be glad to have you.'

'Let me stay,' I answered; 'I will stop in my own room.'

And he humoured me. Amongst that throng I had no desire to follow my dead—mine if theirs; and when they had all departed, the silent house, the stillness broken by no sound save that of the tolling-bell, was more eloquent to me of one 'gone before' than the dark procession, the gaping grave.

When it was all over, when earth had been given to earth, and dust returned to dust, when the mourners had come back, and cake and wine had duly been eaten and drunk, Dr Packman knocked at my door,

'Miss Annie,' he said, 'as a matter of form you had better come down-stairs ; the Will is going to be read.'

'What have I to do with her Will?' I asked.

'Happily, nothing,' he answered ; 'nevertheless, do as I tell you ;' and I obeyed.

How the men and the women assembled below scowled at me as, holding Dr Packman's hand, I entered ! They edged closer together, moving away from the corner we occupied, as though I had brought contagion into the room.

'Shouldn't wonder if she has left the girl every farthing,' I heard one very evil-looking man remark, after which there was a 'hush-sh !' and the attorney, who had nodded to me pleasantly and encouragingly, began.

The Will was very short. She had been possessed of little, and at her death she divided it fairly and simply amongst all her 'dear children.' To her grandchild, Annie Trenet, being already provided for, she left merely her love and blessing. She appointed her eldest son Isaac guardian of the said Annie Trenet, and named Isaac Motfield and Dr Decimus Packman executors.

'That is all, ladies and gentlemen,' said the lawyer, when he finished reading, marvelling apparently at the dead hush and silence which succeeded ; and he rose, and Will in hand stood, so it seemed to me, inviting comment.

There ensued a pause, which was broken at length by the husband of some one of my unknown aunts.

'I call that a Will such as all Wills should be,' he said in an accent which actually appalled me. 'And what I mean to say is this : we have all done Miss Annie there a great injustice, and I for one am sorry for it. Will you shake hands, niece ?'

Thus accosted, what could I do but comply with his request, having the pleasure at the same time of hearing Mrs Daniel Motfield remark—

'Artful little baggage ! she has been living on the fat of the land all these years past.'

'Artful baggage yourself, ma'am, or civil language, if *you* please,' shouted my latest champion, who, I discovered subsequently, had married a female Motfield older even than my

Uncle Isaac. 'I say the Will is a just Will ; and more nor that, I say, if ever this young lady wants a friend, I'll stand by her. Now, my dear, maybe you'll want a home.'

'No,' interrupted Dr Packman, decidedly ; 'not while my sister and I have one to offer her. But Miss Annie has money. Her future residence must be decided by her sole guardian ;' and he indicated Uncle Isaac.

'Oh, we understand all about that. He has played his cards well,' said Mrs Daniel, who was simply irrepressible, as I knew to my cost.

At this juncture I got up ; I did not care for Mrs Daniel or the whole assembled multitude.

'Take me from them, uncle,' I cried, crossing the room to where he stood. 'Take me away anywhere ; there is not one of them who loved grannie one bit.'

It was an accusation they could not answer. They made way for us to pass without a word more being spoken, and you, and you, and you, who have lived in the world, and understand its pleasant ways, can guess how my relatives loved me after that confession of faith.

What did their love or hate matter to me, however ? She, the only woman excepting my mother who had ever cared for me, was dead ; what farther sorrow could time or experience bring ?

That was what youth said ; what time and experience said is quite another affair.

Then I had but youth to consult, and that which youth bid me do I did. For hours at a stretch I sat in the churchyard, beside a grave my own hand had beautified ; I wept in passionate despair when I woke in the mornings, I cried through the day, I sobbed myself to sleep at night.

In the presence of others I kept my grief in the background, and fancied no one suspected how much I fretted, but in this I was wrong. It had been tacitly agreed amongst those who at that time interested themselves about my welfare, it was best the fever of trouble should be left to take its own course ; and when I came to my senses again, it filled me with a terrible feel

ing of shame to find how, while I fancied I was bearing my sorrow silently and alone, every one had been really studying my wishes, humouring my whims, keeping silence at times when speech would have proved far easier, if not one-half so wise.

When many weeks had passed, when the first grief was spent, when I had begun dimly to understand that the affairs of life must go on, whether people were happy or miserable, my Uncle Isaac came over to Alford once again.

By advice of Dr Packman, my fancy for remaining in the cottage had hitherto been indulged.

True, they did not leave me alone there all day, but they left me sufficiently alone to humour the idea that no one ever tried to come between me and my grief. Now, however, it was necessary to consider the future. Where was I to live? with whom, and how?

If the cottage were let, it was estimated a sufficient annual income could be secured to enable me to reside with some quiet family, and to continue my studies. Dr Packman and his sister wished to give me a home free of all charge, but to this arrangement my uncle would by no means consent.

‘Nannie cannot intrude on the kindness of friends for ever,’ he said; ‘and what she is to do, and what she is to be, had better be decided now than hereafter.’

‘Herr Droigel will be with us the day after to-morrow,’ suggested Dr Packman; ‘would it not be well to defer coming to any conclusion until we hear his opinion?’

‘What has Herr Droigel to do with the matter?’ inquired my uncle.

‘Ask your niece,’ replied the Doctor, looking significantly at me.

But I exclaimed—

‘No, no; I shall never sing—I shall never want to sing again.’

‘Time will do wonders for you, my dear,’ said the Doctor, kindly; while my uncle, without taking any notice of my declaration, remarked—

‘I thought Herr Droigel said it would be better for her not to sing much, not to take singing lessons at all.’

‘He did say so,’ was the answer, ‘but there was a reason for that, which I will explain presently. Meantime, before opening any communication with Mrs Mitchell concerning the pupil-teacher plan, to which it is evident you incline, I should like you to have ten minutes’ chat with Droigel.’

‘We need not wait for Herr Droigel, Doctor,’ I interrupted, petulantly; ‘I shall never sing again.’

‘Very well, dear,’ said Dr Packman. ‘No one shall force you into any course distasteful to your feelings; nevertheless,’ he added, *sotto voce*, ‘we will wait for my friend.’

After that conversation I had a relapse into despair. The mere mention of my voice brought back all the anxiety it had caused, all the changes it had wrought. Over and over again I repeated to myself the words I spoke to Dr Packman—‘Nothing should ever induce me to sing; I would never open a piano more.’ Sitting in the graveyard, under the shade of an ancient yew-tree, which sheltered the spot where she lay, I tormented myself by wishing that my grandmother could only understand how completely in unison our ideas on that vexed question were at last.

I was there in the quiet hush of a summer’s afternoon, quite alone. My uncle had gone with Dr Packman for a drive, and it was arranged that on the morrow Herr Droigel’s opinion as to my future career should be taken.

To rebel against that opinion was my firm intention. Now she was dead, I resolved never to adopt a profession my grandmother would have disapproved of my entering during her lifetime.

I made that resolution beside her grave, and offered it to her memory, just in the same spirit as I had gathered flowers, and laid them on the turf that covered her resting-place. How calm and peaceful and still everything seemed! The gardens of Little Alford Manor-house, that sloped down quite to the wall of the churchyard, the woods beyond with scarce a breath of air stirring the leaves, the quiet graveyard with its many grassy hillocks, its few and simple headstones, the old, old church, with its small diamond-paned windows, its low tower covered to the very top with ivy, its gray weather-beaten walls, its tiled roof, and its

lych-gate. There was not a creature moving, not a human being crossed, while I remained, the foot-path that led away first to the meadows, where cows chewed the cud lazily, and farther on to a stream, where under the alders the speckled trout flashed in and out of deep clear silent pools.

Everything in the landscape was peaceful and beautiful. I alone felt at discord with Nature. Firmly I then believed the sight of the sun would never bring happiness to me again. What good I proposed to myself or the dead by sitting thus, I cannot imagine. I only know I stayed till the shadow thrown by the church-tower warned me it was time to return to our cottage. Rising slowly from the ground, I was about to leave the place, when a voice close at hand said softly—

‘Soh, my poor little maiden, it is thus we meet once more ;’ and Herr Droigel, for it was he, took my hand in both of his, while he shook his great head mournfully, with an expression of tender sentiment, that would at any other time have seemed to me irresistibly funny, pervading his fat face.

‘You have suffered,’ he went on, ‘that is bad ; you eat nothing, you sleep little, that is worse ; you sit here thinking to bring back your dead to life, that is worst of all. My little child, did I not tell thee it was good for you to love your grandmother ? Yes. Then I tell thee now it is good for you to leave her. She would tell you this if that tongue so silent could speak. She would say, “Mine love, weeping beside my grave is not what you should be doing.” She would say, “Have pity on your pretty buds, and make up no garlands to wither in memoriam of one whose eyes now behold the flowers of Paradise.” She would say, “You have shed many, many tears ; shed no more, because I am where there are no tears.” She would say, “There is a time for weeping and a time for rejoicing ; you have wept ; you should now rejoice, because there are so many good kind friends left who love you much.” Come ;’ and he drew my hand within his arm, and thus we walked together to Dr Packman’s house.

Arrived there, we found tea ready, and Miss Packman, her brother, and my uncle in the drawing-room.

‘And now, good gentlemen both,’ said Herr Droigel, when, after seeing me comfortably seated, he drew up a chair to the table preparatory to commencing an attack on the good things Miss Packman had provided for him—‘and now, good gentlemen both, you remember when I went out I said I would give you one reply when I came back. My reply is—I make no advice about Miss Annie except Miss Annie’s self be close at my elbow to hear.

‘Miss Annie being here, when I have eaten, when I have drunken some cups of amiable Miss Packman’s tea, we will talk. Eat, mine love,’ he went on, addressing me; ‘you will never understand our talk, if you listen to it while starving.’

There was no fear of Herr Droigel failing to understand the conversation if quantities of food were stimulants to comprehension.

Before his gigantic appetite disappeared mountains of bread-and-butter, hillocks of toasted cakes, a dish covered with slices of ham, and the best part of a cold fowl. To this succeeded a second course of jellies, jams, and marmalade; and when he had finished that, and half-a-dozen large cups of tea, he wound up with about a quart of strawberries, which he literally drowned in cream, in turn solidifying the cream with half a basinful of powdered white sugar.

When he had demolished this last enemy he heaved a sigh, complimented Miss Packman on ‘her delicate consideration in remembering the preferences of her devoted Droigel,’ pushed his chair back, and inquired if what we had to say could not be talked over amongst the ‘roses and the lilies.’

Without doubt it is this ‘roses and lilies’ business which make those who have been thrown much in contact with Germans so bitter against and so suspicious of those of the Fatherland who honour our country with their presence. When a man finds that all this charm of manner covers something which is not in the least charming in its results; when he discovers that underneath the velvet glove lurks the grasp of iron; that subservient to all other human interests lies the desire of self-

aggrandizement, it becomes very difficult to tolerate figures of speech and graces of sentiment.

‘Your money or your life,’ may not be a pleasant form of words, but it possesses at least the advantage of perfect intelligibility.

When precisely the same result has been compassed by a more gracefully-turned sentence, or series of sentences, the celerity of the procedure only aggravates the rage of the victim.

We, sitting among the roses and lilies of Herr Droigel’s sentiment, were, however, novices to all this sort of thing, and listened to the graces of language to which Herr Droigel treated us in the same frame of mind as that with which one might contemplate the antics of a kitten.

With what delight, by the way, must these foreigners observe the tolerant self-complacency wherewith English people regard them !

If we could catch a glimpse of them, when the mask is off, the disguise of that ‘so charming simplicity’ put on one side, as a man might don a useful topcoat, should we not find these ‘mere children of nature’ screaming with laughter and exclaiming in their detestable gutturals—

‘What a fool is this dear John Bull, what a fool is Mrs Bull, what fools are the young ladies and the young gentlemen, sons and daughters of John and his wife !’

As before indicated, however, we listened to Herr Droigel that evening even as he himself would have tenderly put it, ‘like calves of the Bull family ;’ thereby implying a more touching extent of gullibility than is to be found ordinarily amongst that bucolic race.

Certainly we knew no more of Germany, of the cleverness of its inhabitants, of the dexterity with which they can manipulate conversation and blow bubbles in the air all the time they are really trying to catch fish in the stream, than the babes in the wood.

Happy was it for us, simpletons as we were, that Herr Droigel was so honest a rogue, so clever a self-seeker, so straight-

forward a deceiver, so virtuous a hypocrite as time proved him to be.

Had he been treacherous as Delilah we should have fallen into his hands all the same.

‘Sit here, Miss Annie,’ began the large creature, grouping us to his satisfaction on some seats placed under a mulberry-tree in the Doctor’s old-fashioned garden, ‘you and I are old friends; we understand one another. Come and sit near to your own Droigel, who has been put on the rack, who has been subjected to what your merciful lawgivers used to call the question, all for you. Yes, it is true; no sooner did I arrive here this afternoon, seeking rest and repose after the heat and burden, than Miss Packman commences to speak about “Annie,” whom she loved as her own sister. She has not finished talking before two gentlemen appear in a gig. They are both hot, having of their own free will been driving in the sun, but they are not so hot as their horse, which, without any will of its own, has been driven in the sun—poor horse !

‘One of these pair says, pointing to the other, “This is Annie’s uncle, Mr Motfield—my old and valued friend Herr Droigel.”

‘Droigel stands two inches higher in his shoes, and is charmed.

‘Then Dr Packman says, “It is desirable some decision be come to concerning Annie’s future ;” and Mr Motfield adds, “What should you advise, Herr Droigel ?” And how do you suppose I answered your friends, Miss Annie ?’ finished Herr Droigel, turning suddenly towards me.

‘I fancy you did not answer them at all,’ I said, remembering his speech made before he had, to quote his own phrase, ‘eaten and drunken.’

‘Wrong, Miss Annie,’ was his reply. ‘I answered, “I am going out, gentlemen, for a few minutes; when I return I shall have pleasure to reply to you.”’

Then ensued a silence, which no one else seeming disposed to break, Herr Droigel again took up his parable—

‘I went across the green common to the pretty house I re-

membered ; there was no Annie there. I asked a servant, not pretty, but good — good I should say certainly — where I might find the young miss, and the servant pointed a finger towards the church-tower. So I went softly to God's acre, with a light tread and a heavy heart, and there I found this child sitting beside a grave, on which newly-woven wreaths were already withering. I brought her back with me. That is my little story ; suppose, gentlemen, you now tell yours.'

Once again there ensued a pause, which was broken, however, this time by Dr Packman—

‘When you were here last summer Annie sang for you, and you said she had a voice.’

‘Mein Gott ! I only hope she has not lost it,’ ejaculated Herr Droigel ; ‘but eating nothing, drinking nothing, crying much, sitting in damp graveyards—that is not the way to preserve a voice. No doubt,’ he added, mournfully, ‘the gift has been withdrawn, the lute broken. I warned you that organ was delicate. Do not blame me if the life in it has been destroyed.’

‘But, my good friend, you said to me yourself——’ began Dr Packman, excitedly.

‘But, mein goot friend, you said to me yourself,’ interrupted Herr Droigel, with imperturbable calmness—‘come nearer to me, Miss Annie, and you shall hear just what he said. Here where we sit, while we two were smoking our pipes, I asked, “What does all this mean—what is the mystery ?” and then he began : “Droigel, the girl must not go to London yet. She is an orphan ; she has always lived with a grandmother, and they are devoted to each other. The old lady’s time here cannot be long. That is the meaning and the mystery.” So now, Miss Annie, you know why I told you to get strong and love your grandmother. Complete frankness is best ; I love not secrets and reserves and whispers.’

‘It seems to me,’ interposed my uncle, ‘that the future and the present are what we are now concerned with. The past signifies little.’

‘It signifies a great deal,’ exclaimed Herr Droigel, with emotion. ‘Himmel ! to think of a whole year having been lost at her age ; and yet not lost,’ he added, remembering his former sentiments—‘not lost, since it was spent with one this dear Miss Annie loved so much.’

And he took my hand and stroked it reflectively.

‘Well, the past cannot be recalled, at all events,’ said Dr Packman. ‘Mr Motfield is quite right there ; and what we have now to decide is, whether Annie shall go to Mrs Mitchell’s as a pupil-teacher, or——’

‘What is a pupil-teacher ?’ interrupted the German ; and on being informed he remarked, ‘Proceed. I beg your pardon for being so rude as to break in on your sentence, only I want to make my points as we go on.’

‘Or,’ continued Dr Packman, ‘whether she shall devote herself to the musical profession.’

‘Meaning——’ suggested Herr Droigel.

‘Meaning, in other words,’ explained Dr Packman, ‘shall she be a governess or a singer ?’

‘Good ; that is, supposing she has not lost her voice, and can sing,’ observed Herr Droigel. ‘And now what says Miss Annie herself ?’

‘I shall never sing again.’

‘Good, once more. Now, gentlemen both, have you said your says ? Have you, Miss Annie, said your little say ?’

‘I believe so,’ answered my uncle, while Dr Packman nodded ; and I repeated my statement in a different form, ‘I shall be a governess ;’ of which statement Herr Droigel did not take any notice beyond stroking my hand solemnly and thoughtfully once more.

‘You English have a charming adage about buying a pig in a poke. I do not know what a poke is—I never met anybody who did ; but I take it to mean that no one but a fool plays at cards blindfold. You have done me so great honour as to ask my advice about this dear Miss Annie. If I ask two three questions you will not say, when my broad back is turned,

That Droigel, what a most horribly rude fellow he is ! prying into this thing, peering into that.'

'Ask any questions you like,' said my uncle, heartily. 'I think we have all the same object at heart.'

Quite true, dear uncle ; the same object, with a difference, happily, perhaps for me.

'Very good ; I thank you, Mr Motfield. Now you and Dr Packman, my highly-esteemed old friend, seem agreed that as a matter of living—bread-and-butter, we shall say—it is necessary this young miss should turn her attention to teaching other young misses. That is so ?'

'That is so,' answered my uncle.

'And why is it so ?—forgive me if I seem rude beyond imagination. Regard me as a doctor ; this good child is sick ; I want to know what prescription to make, I ask questions that seem to you babble.'

'The greater part of my mother's income died with her,' was the reply, 'and the part which did not she divided equally amongst her children, purposely excluding Annie from all interest in it.'

'What had Miss Annie done ?'

'She had money of her own—more, by far, than my mother could give to her children. I think the Will a just one ; there should be no favouritism in families.'

'Then Miss Annie is in a small way an heiress, as our good friend here gave me to understand ?'

'Yes, but only in a small way. She would have enough—if the cottage could be let advantageously—to live on had she been different—of a different nature, I mean.'

'I understand ; it is the *noblesse oblige* element which causes difficulty. Miss Annie is a young lady, and has been brought up as a young lady should be. And you think, my dear,' this to me, 'it will please you to be a governess ?'

'I think I must be one,' I answered. 'By my own wish money has been spent on my education ; it would never do to have that money wasted.'

‘And how much, if I may inquire, has been spent upon this learning?’ asked Herr Droigel.

‘Books, and everything included, about a hundred pounds,’ answered my uncle.

‘Gott in Himmel!’ ejaculated Herr Droigel, ‘and nothing for it, nothing!’

‘I dined at Mrs Mitchell’s every day,’ I explained.

‘Dined, yes, that is something. At the quality of the dinner I make no guess. What knowledge you got might not fill that;’ and he touched the bowl of his pipe significantly.

‘Mrs Mitchell would give me a small salary even now,’ I said, with a sense of offended dignity pervading my manner.

‘Are you quite sure of that, my dear?’ he asked, then continued. ‘No doubt, though, she would give you a premium to teach other young misses to know as little as you do. Yes, dat is England,’ and he looked on the ground, in deep thought, whilst I, swelling with anger, was compelled to keep silence, because I really did not know in what form of words to express my feelings.

‘I am of opinion that Miss Annie and the respectable Mrs Mitchell would get on most admirably together,’ said Herr Droigel at length; ‘but still if I was you and Miss Annie, I would think over that matter for a week. As Miss Annie has made up her mind so certainly never to sing more, it is of no use inquiring whether her voice is gone or not.’

After which Herr Droigel devoted himself to an admiring contemplation of the roses and lilies. I do not think I ever hated a human being as I detested the fat German, the while I watched his ponderous figure stooping over the flowers, caressing with his great hands ‘the dear buds,’ so he styled them.

I did not then understand the real cause of my mortification and disgust, but I comprehend now it is one thing to say we will never use a talent again, but quite another not to be asked to exercise it.

Only the other afternoon Herr Droigel told me, in an unwanted burst of confidence, that he understood the ‘little ways of womans.’

If he ever reads these pages he can take the satisfaction out of them of knowing I thoroughly believe *that* statement, at all events.

CHAPTER XX.

WE ARE ALL SATISFIED.

BEFORE we had finished breakfast next morning Herr Droigel entered the room.

‘I have come to make one request,’ he said to my uncle. ‘Whilst Miss Annie is attending to her little household cares, following the example of Desdemona the bewitching, will you walk with me? Our good friend Packman is, as usual, off to see patients and make fees—what a charming profession is that of a doctor!—and that adorable Miss Packman, whom I have lofed ever since mine eyes first rested on her countenance, is engaged also, as becomes an English lady, in various works of domestic use. It is a heavenly morning. Say, dear sir, will the sun and the sky tempt you?’

‘The sun and the sky might not,’ answered my uncle, ‘but you, Herr Droigel, are irresistible.’

Whereupon the German laid his hand on his waistcoat and bowed, with that utter oblivion of the possibility of there being anything ridiculous in his appearance, which is usual amongst foreigners.

‘And how is Miss Annie to-day?’ he went on. ‘To my thinking a little *triste*—a trifle what you call out of sorts.’

‘I am not out of sorts,’ I answered; ‘I am only tired.’

‘Tired; that is bad,’ he said, with such an expression of sudden and genuine concern in his face, that I felt more than half inclined to condone his offences of omission and commission. ‘I do not like to hear a young miss say she is tired so early that she can have had no time to get weary. If you were my child,

I should carry you off from Alford. I would let your eyes look on the Rhine. If you could not walk, I would carry you up the Swiss mountains. You should loiter at Geneva, and take Paris on your way home. No more "tiredness" then. You would be your old self, the Miss Annie I made friends with twelve months ago.'

'I am certain a change would do her a world of good,' agreed my uncle.

'Good! yes, I should think it would. Before she goes to Madam Mitchell, she ought to have one, two, three months' holiday. Yes, Miss Annie, I am right. You have been weeping; you have been sitting beside damp graves; you have been fretting after a dear grandmother, who does not fret for you. The dead are so ungrateful; it is the only fault I have to find with them. And now you want to get right away, out of sight even of Droigel, with whom you were angry last night—why, he does not know, unless it is because he doubted whether you had got your money's worth for your money. Never mind; smile, smile again, Miss Annie, and I will declare you have had six copper pennies in exchange for every silver sixpence. We are friends once more, is it not so?' and coming behind my chair, he laid a great hand on each of my shoulders, and stood in that attitude until I was forced into saying we were, and I hoped always should be, friends.

Hearing which, Herr Droigel sighed heavily.

'Your tone is not hearty, Miss Annie. You have got a fit of the English reserve. You are not transparent like me. You have some second thought. You are angry, and I know not why. Never mind,' he added, cheerfully; 'some day I shall know—some day, when miss understand how truly and entirely I am her friend.'

What answer could I make to this? What could I say, save in a fit of remorse—

'I am not angry. I am only foolish; I am out of tune.'

'Ah, how clever that is!' he soliloquized in an audible whisper. 'Out of the depths of her feminine temper she speaks to me as a musician. How good it is!—a string loose, a string

broken ; no matter who sweep the keys, a discord results. Yes, she is right. She wants to be in tune, and then all would be sweet as once it was.'

Yielding to the influence of this judicious flattery, I permitted myself to be led back into the paths of good humour. Once, indeed, I actually laughed, and I could not help noticing my uncle's look of pleased surprise at the sound.

'Will you dine with us to-day?' he asked.

'No,' answered Herr Droigel. 'I have principle, I have feeling. If the good doctor asks me to stay with him year after year, as he does, I say to myself, "Droigel, you are part of this dear man's family. You go not out to eat, you go not out to drink while there. You make not a lodgment of his house." But if you or any other like to request the pleasure of my society altogether for two—three days, good ; I say not then no.'

'Will you give us the pleasure of your society' (alas, I fear he found me dull !) 'for two or three days?' asked my uncle eagerly.

'Let us talk about that as we walk,' answered Herr Droigel, gravely ; and the pair took their hats and sallied forth.

I went with them as far as the gate, and watched for a minute as they sauntered across the green. Suddenly Herr Droigel turned and came hurrying back to where I stood.

'You will make a great try, Miss Annie,' he said, 'to be like your own bright self of a year ago. It is so much trouble, I know, for both ; but think, think how bad it is for him.'

And without giving me time to answer, he was gone, leaving me with ample food for thought during his absence.

The longer I thought, the more unendurable became the idea of changing the life I was leading for an existence cabined and confined by the rules and regulations of Mrs Mitchell's establishment for young ladies. I was loyal to my grandmother's prejudices. Honestly I meant to adhere to my resolution of singing no more for ever ; and yet still I believe, had Herr Droigel asked me that evening to uplift my voice, I should not, to quote his own words, have said no.

Herr Droigel, however, was a great deal too astute to ask

anything of the kind. Taking my statement apparently as final, he never mentioned my voice, he never spoke to me about music ; but he came and stayed at the cottage for two days, and during that time he played and sang, with many apologies, as he said, 'to please himself, to pass the time.'

'I shall interfere not with you, Miss Annie,' he would remark. 'While you are making your puddings, giving out your stores, marking your linen, I will amuse myself arranging one so simple melody. I will play soft, so as not to disturb a little baby ; and when you have thrown off your household cares and return, I will shut the instrument : not a note shall jar upon you.'

What a stupid little fool I was ! I used to listen outside the door while he played, taking in fresh life, fresh thoughts, fresh health, and yet I would not turn the handle and, going up to him, say, 'Herr Droigel, music is the breath of my breath. I cannot live without it. I put my future in your hands. Tell me what I must make of it.'

The old influence was upon me, only stronger than of yore ; yet I could not, now the restraining hand was withdrawn, 'gang mine ain gait' with the smallest pleasure ; and knowing all this, luxuriating in the struggle he comprehended was going on, Herr Droigel only said calmly—

'What a pity miss does not care for music as she once did ! It would be useful for her, if she is to teach all manner of accomplishments to English heiresses.'

'Uncle,' I said at length one evening, when a remark to this effect seemed to have drawn blood from every vein in my heart, 'you hear what Herr Droigel says ; you know what I feel ; you understand what holds me back. If you were in my place, what should you do ?'

There must have been some of the concentrated passion I felt evidenced in my manner, for my uncle looked up at me in surprise, whilst Herr Droigel maintained a discreet silence.

'What should I do, Nannie ?' repeated my uncle. 'You know my opinion of old. It has undergone no change.'

'But oh, uncle, you told me always to be good to grannie.'

'And were you not, my poor child ?' he said. 'If we all

faithfully performed our duties as you did yours, there would be few aching hearts in the world, I fancy.'

'But she did not want me to sing,' I sobbed out.

'She could not sing herself, Nannie, and was unable to understand what the gift meant to you. She was a good woman, the best I ever knew,' he added, speaking with a tremor in his voice which compelled his breaking off suddenly; 'but,' he went on, after a pause, 'although she was so good and so true, we must not let our love blind us to the fact that her world was a small one, and that save through her love for you she never looked beyond it. I fancy, Nan,' he said, by way of conclusion, 'you, the stray lamb in our family, enlarged both our ideas. I never should have learnt toleration but for you.'

'Hear!' exclaimed Herr Droigel, in a fat tenor.

'But, uncle,' I said, unheeding that mark of approval, 'if you were in my place, what should you do?'

'I should state my wishes to my friends, dear, and be guided by their advice. As for the dead'—once again he paused, but proceeded almost immediately—'I should consider the spirit of her wishes, instead of examining the letter. What my mother desired you to be, Nannie, was a good and happy woman. To my thinking you will be both good and happy if you use to the uttermost the gift God has given you. Had you become a great singer in her lifetime, no one would have felt more pride in the fact than my mother. She would have sat in the reserved seats, and whispered to her neighbour with modest pride, "That is my granddaughter."

'Bravo!' exclaimed Herr Droigel.

'Then do you mean to say you think I ought to take to music as a profession?' I asked, breathlessly.

'I think you have a gift,' he answered. 'I know you are in such a position that, if you have a gift and can make money out of it, you are bound to do so.'

'And if *she* can look down?' I asked, after a pause.

'If she can, it will be with eyes from which the film of human prejudice has been removed. She can either see our affairs clearly now, Nan, or not at all.'

‘Then what ought I to do, uncle?’

‘Ask Herr Droigel.’

‘Herr Droigel, what ought I to do?’

‘If Droigel were anything but a drivelling fool, he would say, “Miss Annie, what are your affairs to me? Do what pleases you best.” Oh, you women, young and old, you are all alike. You take a man, and fling him away, soh! in your pretty tempers. When you want his help—and that is often—you go and pick him up and wind him round your finger, and ask his advice. Fortunate it is for your sex that we are simpletons: that we are without understanding, as the Bible says; that you can put bits in our mouths, and drive us here, there, everywhere. What ought you to do? you ask, Miss Annie. What you like, I reply; and that is what you will do; and you will get some foolish man, like Mr Motfield and me, to help you at every step. To-morrow you shall come to me and say what you want, or rather I shall come to you and hear what you want. To-night I want, with your most gracious permission, to try the effect of a song I wrote to-day under the mulberry-tree of that dear Packman. May I, without offence, open your instrument? Ten million thanks and apologies. Now I will sing.’

He sang; and, closing my eyes, I listened. It may seem ridiculous, but I never could bear to look at Herr Droigel when he was singing. The voice was the voice of an archangel; the body whence it proceeded was as unwieldy as that of an elephant—a mountain of soft, flabby, unpleasant fat flesh.

If memory serve me rightly, it is in one of Miss Edgeworth’s tales that an account is given of a young lady who—disgusted with the prosaic comfort of her own home, and charmed with the ethereal view of life taken by a certain sentimental authoress in whose works she delighted, over whose touching sentences she wept—entered into a correspondence with the gifted one, and finally left her home; and, to the surprise and dismay of the gifted one, appeared in due course of time at the G. O.’s abode, which turned out to be rooms over a pastrycook’s shop.

To have dreamt of roses and honeysuckles, to have visioned an ideal home, where the jasmine shone faintly, and the nightin-

gale sang in the myrtle-groves to his mate, and to awake to a fearful reality of bath-buns and raspberry-tarts, was sufficiently trying. Nevertheless there have been those who, in their adversity, lent a charm even to currant-loaves and preserves.

Of such, however, was not the author of those touching tales. She appeared frouzy as concerned her hair, untidy as to her dress, and—may it be spoken?—given to dram-drinking.

The young lady, repentant, returned to her friends, and was disillusioned and restored to the paths of practical, if monotonous, morality, after Miss Edgeworth's favourite fashion.

I often think of that delightfully priggish authoress when I recall Herr Droigel's music. By all her rules of prudence and morality—seeing him eat, seeing him drink, beholding that too large body moved to deeds of agility and locomotion—I ought to have forsaken music at once and for ever. I should have said, 'Of what value is music, if it can be content with such a habitation?' But I did no such thing.

Perhaps, indeed I know, I lamented the setting in which that divine voice was presented; but the voice seemed divine, for all that. Nevertheless I preferred shutting my eyes to the source whence it proceeded.

I was then unaware that when the gift is given, it is rarely provided with a casket to match. I had not then learned that porter, or even white soup, was a good thing for the voice. Like a simpleton, I would here below have separated the soul from the flesh, had such a divorce been possible, and listened to the spirit sounds without the intervention of an unromantic body.

How that man sang! I do not believe he loved music one-half so well as I, and yet his life was a long melody.

'That will do,' he said, when the last note died away, and he took his soft fingers off the keys; 'that will bring down the galleries. I never care,' he went on, speaking to my uncle, 'in this your practical England, for the applause of white gloves. I love to hear the stamp of strong boots, and see madame, in a discreet bonnet, nodding approval in her unbecoming way. Then I know I shall be whistled in the streets, sung by the middle-class million. When I write for the future—for fame—I send

to mine own beloved country, and get, not money, but applause.'

'Why do you not always write for applause?' I inquired.

'Because, my sweet Miss Annie, spite of that cynical Frenchman's remark, "I see not why" in answer, one must live. Sometimes—yes, indeed, occasionally for a very long time—butcher and baker and candlestickmaker, as your distich has it, are forbearing and forgetful to an extent; but another time comes, when one says, "I want money to go to market," and another, "My miller must be paid," and a third, "The Herr from whom I buy tin and brass asks for a few pounds." So there comes the inevitable hour of payment! Ah, if one could live on fame!—if one could! But, alas, although the money itself seems base—base—the goods money can buy are not to be despised. Now,' proceeded this plausible individual, 'suppose that, instead of only having a voice fit to sing in this small room, or in one twice its size, I had an organ like that nature has given to ungrateful Miss Annie, and I could, so to speak, breathe golden guineas, do you think I would indite songs for young ladies to sing? *Ach nien!* But it is always thus. Where the gift is not, it is longed for; where it exists, it is spurned.'

And then he executed an impromptu mazurka, full of unexpected surprises, and quaint strange changes of key; breaking out, after that, into one of the songs of the beloved Fatherland, which must have sounded weird and strange to any English person crossing our village green in the calm twilight.

For me, all through that summer's night, I lay awake talking to the dead; rehearsing my position to ears deaf, I trust, to earthly sounds. As I never could have spoken to her while living, I spoke to her then; confident that if she understood anything, she understood all; and when, towards morning, slumber stole away my waking senses, I dreamed that we were back in the old home at Lovedale, and that, with hand laid on my head, she was telling me to be a singer, if I liked.

'Only be good, Annie—only be good,' she said in conclusion; and with those words ringing in my ears I awoke.

Other sounds than dream voices, I soon found, had contributed

to arouse me. Uncle Isaac was knocking vehemently at my door, and exclaiming—

‘Nannie, do you *never* intend to get up? Herr Droigel has been down for an hour past. He has eaten a dozen nectarines and a quart of mulberries, and now says he is ravenous for breakfast.’

‘Do not wait for me,’ I called out. ‘Give him a gallon of milk and a quartern loaf. I shall be dressed directly.’

My heart felt lighter than it had done for weeks past, and I spoke out of its gladness. I felt so thankful at the prospect of being delivered from Mrs Mitchell and her establishment; and yet still dreading I might be unmindful of grannie, seemingly forgetful of her, I was forced to murmur—

‘Oh, grannie, don’t think me wicked! You know all about it now.’

Sing in that house I imagined I never could, but I meant to sing out of it. I was like a bird longing for the wild woods. Never before—never had I seen a chance of fully gratifying my wishes, of walking along the road I longed to travel. Much trouble had I caused hitherto; trouble I meant to cause no longer. I had a gift, and I would use it. I would be a witch, and breathe golden guineas, to quote our German friend. I would do something to make my relations proud of me. If I were possessed of a four-leaved shamrock, why should I not weave my spells? Why should I not leave the cottage, and go out into the wide, wide world to seek my fortune, as other girls had done?

Why not, indeed? There had been but one obstacle; and time, and my uncle, and my own understanding were fast obliterating that.

Rapidly I dressed and arranged my hair, and gave one last glance at the glass to see I was presentable, before descending into the room, where Herr Droigel—fat, rosy, and innocent-looking—was sitting at the breakfast-table, complacently surveying the ruin he had wrought.

A child might have played with that contented giant then, and I took advantage of my opportunity.

‘Herr Droigel,’ I began, ‘I have thought over all you said

last night, and if you and my uncle still believe I ought to be a singer, I should like to be one.'

'Spoke I not so?' asked the German, addressing his host. 'Said I not this, "Miss Annie wants to sing; she will come down all bright and pleasant, with her little tempers gone, and smiling, give us to comprehend she is willing now to do that which you choose—in other words, that which she wish to do herself?" Oh, what a delightful sex is woman! How steadfast, how unchangeable, and how charming even in her fickleness!'

Having concluded which sentence, Herr Droigel rose; and taking my face between his immense hands, kissed me first on one cheek and then on the other.

Had Herr Droigel's character been as well known a book to me then as it is now, I could have told him that it is an easy matter for a man to be steadfast and unchangeable if he love no other created being, if he acknowledge no Creator, save himself—if he be his own all in all—the alpha and the omega of his fears and his hopes. But in those days I was young, as the reader is aware, and I had not yet eaten of the fruit which teaches us that even fatness and apparent foolishness, joined to a thorough knowledge of music, are not convincing proofs that under the seeming innocence of a dove may not be hidden the subtle cunning of a serpent.

Herr Droigel was no serpent, however; he was merely a self-seeking money-worshipper; and believing I should be worth gold to him, he kissed me, as stated, to my surprise, and to Uncle Isaac's intense amusement.

Truth to tell, I think it was a relief to Uncle Isaac that at length my mind was made up. Since his mother's death, I had been to him something very much in the nature of a white elephant—a useful, not to say ornamental, animal, in some stations of life, but a decided encumbrance to a druggist and chemist in a seaport town, who could not take me back to his own home, and who could ill afford the time and expense involved in travelling backward and forward to mine.

So we were all pleased that morning: my uncle, because he

could now consign me to the care of some one who, as he phrased it, knew more about girls and music than he ; Herr Droigel, for the simple reason (expressed) that he ‘hoped to see Miss Annie smile once more ;’ and I, because I had compassed the wishes of both, and my own too.

Already in my heart, as in the churchyard, the grass had commenced to spring over my grandmother’s grave. Well, it is no sign of want of love that time should wear away the sharp edge of grief, and clothe with flowers and verdure the naked earth. Not even now, though the wound is closed, the sorrow overpast, is the memory of that first, best, truest friend less dear to me than it was in the days when under the yew-tree I sat weeping and wailing for the dead, who could never, I knew, ‘return to me,’ but to whom I had forgotten ‘I might go.’

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW LIFE.

WHAT the pecuniary terms may have been upon which Herr Droigel undertook ‘to adopt me as Gretchen’s sister and his own loved child and pupil,’ I cannot now remember.

Like everything else in which my uncle had a part, they were communicated to me at the time.

Impossible though the middle-aged may find it to realize, there is a time of life when money seems the least good in existence—when pounds, shillings, and pence form no part of youth’s dreams, whether sleeping or waking—and it did not matter to me how much of my little fortune was to be spent in following that vision which had been silently beckoning me for years.

All I am now able to recollect about the matter is, that my uncle considered the remuneration Herr Droigel required extremely reasonable. And reasonable, so far as represented by figures, I do not in the least doubt it was. The German was to board and

lodge me, to instruct me in music, and to 'love me as his own'—he added this last item verbally—for some small amount which seemed to my uncle absurdly low; but then, as my new proprietor remarked with airy generosity—

'If Miss has the sad fate of losing her voice—of disappointing the rich and pig-headed British patron—of hating the artiste life, which is at once so social and so lonely, so grand in itself, so low in the misconstructions of the ignorant—I do not wish that she shall return to this peaceful village—a beggar rendered penniless by Droigel. No, I name a price which means no loss to her, no gain to me. I put Miss Annie on the road to fortune. If she likes the road and is able to walk it, Droigel will share her success. If not, why then Droigel will have no reason to fear the dead grandmother waking him at night, by asking what he has done with the little one's portion.'

'I speculate, in fact,' he proceeded, after an instant's pause, devoted doubtless to a contemplation of the ghostly presence he had himself conjured up. 'I have come on 'Change. Here is a possible, a probable voice. See, I will teach it, I will feed it, I will house it, I will nurse it, I will give myself much trouble; and then, if it make money, I shall go gleaning in its harvest-time; if it make not money—then it cannot be helped; it will be a pity, that is all.'

Whereupon Dr Packman clapped his friend's immense shoulder, and said, 'You are a fine fellow, Droigel;' and my uncle holding out his hand, remarked he considered it a privilege to have known him; in answer to which demonstrations of admiration Herr Droigel turned towards the window, wiped his eyes with a silk pocket-handkerchief, and then took a pinch of snuff out of Dr Packman's box, and blew his nose loudly.

For me, I was in a seventh heaven of delight. Once the matter was settled, Herr Droigel left me no time for regret.

'The sooner Miss Annie begins her London career the better,' he explained. 'I do not mean to set her hard at work immediately. She will want to see the sights. We will go down to the river, where the mighty ships lie at anchor; she must visit the Tower; we will show her the Queen's palace, and all those

great parks and wide streets, empty now, but filled in the season with lords and ladies, fine carriages, shining horses, footmen brilliant as paroquets. She shall behold London with nobody in it,—bah ! nobody except some two million souls ; she shall meet more people in ten minutes than in this quiet Eden in ten months, and still she will see nobody, not till the season recommends, not till the Opera opens, not till I take her into fairyland, where rank and beauty congregate to listen to those so divine strains.'

Uncle Isaac was glad also at the idea of my leaving Alford. He wanted to be back in his shop, to return to his buying and selling, to making fortunes and earning livelihoods for those children of whom his quiver was so full.

Already he had given me much of his time, and he was thankful, I believe, to feel that at length his responsibility was shifted to other shoulders.

Nevertheless, when the hour of parting came he took me in his arms and held me close, as if afraid to let me go. Afterwards he told me that for a moment he felt as if he must recall his permission, as if it were too great a risk to let me thus go forth amongst strangers, a poor slight bark upon the waters of an unknown sea.

But then he remembered it would all have to be gone over again at some future period ; that I had no home I could stay in, no friends I could live with ; that a change had been wrought by death which prevented a return to the former course of things ; and so he restrained himself, and said, ' Nan, you are going out into a new life, but do not forget the old ; you will make new friends, but never mistrust those you are leaving behind you. If you are unhappy, if you dislike your life in any way, write to me frankly, freely, fully. No one shall see your letters except myself.' And then he kissed me over and over again, and so we parted.

' Weep, little one ; never mind Droigel,' said the Professor, compassionately. ' It is a great big world this ; but there is always some tiny piece of its earth that seems fairer to us than any other part, be the other ever so beautiful. There are millions,

billions, trillions of human beings fretting and fuming their little day ; but there is always one human being of whom the heart is fonder than of any other of the millions. I understand all that. I am fat and old ; but I have had my tears, and my soul-aches —ach, yes !'

This permission and encouragement were kindly meant, but had at once the effect of stopping all outward evidence of my grief. It is human nature, I suppose, to do that which it is told not to do—not to do that which it is told to do ; and it was my human nature not to care to indulge in a grief such as had ever been gone through by Herr Droigel. I was still young enough to believe my own griefs to be entirely my own property ; and if, by exhibiting them, part possession came to be claimed by other people, I decided it was better to conceal those treasures with which I desired no one to intermeddle.

Unconsciously was beginning that dislike and distrust of sentimentality, of feelings worn on the sleeve, which stood me in such good stead in after life. I felt grateful towards Herr Droigel for his good intentions ; but I was too old to like the notion of that huge German wiping (figuratively) my tears away.

If a girl or a woman be not hysterical, she can cease crying if she choose. I was not hysterical, and at the end of Herr Droigel's sympathetic speech my eyes were dry. Whereupon he recommenced his individual generalizing. I know no other combination of English words that will express my meaning.

‘ How beautiful is the adaptability of youth ! ’ he said, addressing everybody generally, and me, for want of a better listener, in particular. ‘ What a provision of a bountiful Heaven, that the heavier the shower the sooner it is over ! Consider this, Annie : how long is it since I found you weeping, like Rachel, not indeed for your children, but for your dear grandmother, who was more to you than many children ? You refused to be comforted ; you had but one pleasure, to sit on the grass and cry. Life had stopped himself for you. But time went on nevertheless, and the Miss Annie I knew first singing her little songs, is now walking hand in hand with Droigel, to begin a new life—a life so beautiful ! ’

Herr Droigel described literally our way of proceeding. Hand clasped in hand, like a couple of children, or a pair of simpletons, we were crossing the field-paths to Great Alford.

He had made it a point, that when I left the cottage I should leave likewise old associations and old faces.

‘I do not want to have the leave-takings,’ he said. ‘When she bids “good-bye” to the place, let her bid “good-bye” to the loved friends too ; after that trust all to Droigel.’ The result of which was, that our luggage having been sent over to Great Alford, we followed after in the absurd fashion I have mentioned.

There was no one there to see, however, and holding my small hand in his great one seemed to please the Professor ; so ‘hand in hand’ we walked on together, whilst Herr Droigel poured forth quarts of conversational froth.

My experience of Germans was limited at that period—so limited, indeed, that Herr Droigel happened to be the only one with whom I had hitherto held converse ; nevertheless my first experience warrants my last theory—namely, that let the circumstances under which one is placed with a German be what they will, he is certain to talk.

The determination of the natives of that country to say something, when no human being wants them to say anything, is perfectly marvellous. As a rule they reserve all their thoughts for books or business ; as a rule they are totally destitute of any sense of humour ; but certainly as a rule they talk, or, perhaps, it would be better to say, babble. The stream is level and uninteresting ; it is not fetid, it is not wise ; it is certainly not witty, though a perfectly unembarrassed mind may contrive to be amused with, not at it.

The mystery would be why so astute a people should so seek to clothe themselves with a cloak of want of tact and dulness, were it not that the world may safely believe the Germans know their own business best.

Herr Droigel did, at all events, and babbled on sweetly concerning the infinite wisdom and mercy of a Providence in whose existence I have not the slightest reason to suppose he believed,

until we reached the coach which was to convey us the first part of our way to London.

Railways have not yet arrived at the length of delivering passengers at every house ; then there were several towns they did not condescend to notice. Great Alford was one of those neglected. From that place to the nearest station we travelled by coach.

On that coach—for we travelled outside, and I liked the journey—Herr Droigel made himself agreeable to guard and driver, and to his fellow-passengers. He spoke of me as his daughter, and people were kind in consequence. When we left the conveyance, it struck me, however, that both guard and coachman were not quite satisfied at sight of the extremely small coin of the realm with which he rewarded their services. Perhaps I was mistaken ; perhaps his manner, lordly and free, had unduly raised their expectations.

At the station this impression was not reproduced : porters are thankful for extremely small gifts, and the twopence Herr Droigel gave—I know it was twopence, for I saw the amount placed in the hand of a servant of the company—seemed to afford that servant satisfaction,—perhaps because it was in contravention of the company's rules.

Anyhow he took the twopence, and we were all pleased—I especially ; because the surly looks of guard and driver had somewhat discomposed my equanimity.

For the second time in my life I was in a railway carriage. How green the fields looked—how strange the hedges hurrying by—how frightened the cattle scurrying off at our approach—how wonderful the thronged stations—how strange it seemed to lose passengers and to gain others. What a new world to me.

But after a few hours I grew tired of it. Nobody knew me, nobody cared for me, nobody looked at me, nobody spoke to me, save occasionally Herr Droigel, who slept a good deal, and got out at all the stations and made ineffectual attempts to open up conversations with fellow-travellers, who obviously distrusted and feared foreigners, and responded in monosyllable ; and so at last when evening closed in, I too fell asleep, and was only wakened

by a horrible clamour, which when I roused myself and listened attentively, meant, I found—

‘ Tickets ready—all tickets here ! ’ Then after a few minutes’ panting and racing and screaming, the engine slackened speed and some one said—

‘ This is London ; ’ and again I rubbed my eyes and alighted.

In one of Miss Edgeworth’s innocent plays, a boy is made to say—‘ I cannot see the town for houses.’

Miss Edgeworth in this sentence exactly defined my feelings at first sight of London.

I could not understand it ; and as we drove through street after street, and then through more streets, I who had never realized what a great city means, felt like the man who coming to a rapid river, sat down on the bank waiting for the stream to cease flowing. I was waiting to come to some place ‘ where I could see the town,’ when our conveyance stopped.

‘ Welcome to your new home, beloved Annie ! ’ and so speaking, Herr Droigel led me up three steps and into a narrow hall, where we were met by a woman and a girl, whom Herr Droigel greeted, to my intense astonishment—I had learnt enough of his language to understand the meaning of a few substantives—as his wife and daughter.

That Madame Droigel ! *that* Gretchen ! I could have wept, but that past experience had convinced me weeping was useless. Had I been possessed of sufficient courage, I should have rushed after our departing vehicle, and said, ‘ Take me, oh, pray take me anywhere out of this world ! ’

There was a large woman, without collar or tucker, who was kissed by Herr Droigel—a woman made and clothed in defiance of all rules then accepted, poor as, by comparison with the present, was the best code of dress then known. There was Gretchen, untidy likewise—untidy beside me.

Very much the advantage I felt at that moment of my well-fitting dress—the young and slight are so easy to fit: my neatly-pleated crape trimmings—my sorrowful bands—my close mourning bonnet, from which, no doubt, a pale face looked out sorrowfully

‘How do you do, dear afflicted Miss Annie?’ said the woman without a tucker, kissing me with lips that smelt of garlic, and then presenting a full cheek in order that I might return her greeting.

‘How do you do, dear?’ said Miss Gretchen, rubbing her face against mine. ‘Aren’t you tired? Come up-stairs. Should you like to have supper first, and go to bed afterwards; or go to bed first, and have supper afterwards?’

‘I should like, if I might do so, to go to bed and have no supper,’ I answered, feebly.

‘Just as you please, dear one.’

‘Thou art weary, is it not so?’ asked Madame Droigel, laying her plump hands on my shoulder. ‘Yes, go to bed, and I myself will bring thee up a cup of tea.’

‘No, muder,’ interposed Gretchen, whose life was, as I found afterwards, spent in mimicking her father and mother’s forms of speech. ‘I myself mean to wait upon Miss Annie. She is to have everything she wants, and nothing she does not want—tonight,’ added the young lady, with an ominous accent on the last word. ‘Is it not so?’ she asked, turning to her father.

‘To-night and all days and nights Miss Annie shall have everything she wants that I can give her,’ said Herr Droigel, with paternal tenderness. ‘My child, you are worn out. Go with my Gretchen. Gretchen, be tender to this little fragile bud.’

‘The bud [shall be tenderly handled by me,’ answered his daughter; and so saying, she led the way up to a room on the second floor, where, in the midst of a desert of bare boards, there was placed a small bedstead, a painted chest of drawers (above which hung a little glass), a rush-bottomed chair, a washhand-stand—provided with a jug about the size of a cream ewer, and a basin no larger than a soap-cup—completed the furniture of this apartment.

‘You will be happy here?’ It is due to Miss Gretchen’s common sense to say she asked the question doubtfully.

I could not answer. If I had opened my lips to speak, I must have burst out crying; and I did not want to cry. I

looked round the bare room, and contrasted it with my little chamber at Lovedale, my larger and prettier apartment at Alford.

Well, I had chosen ! I had decided to give up everything for music. I had gone too far to turn back again. I could not have everything.

‘I will try to be happy,’ I said, after a pause, filled up by the thoughts indicated. ‘I am sure you are very kind. It would be a shame if I did not try to be happy.’

‘You would not like me, I suppose, to call you “Bud”?’ suggested Miss Gretchen ; ‘and so I will not do it, though I shall always think of you in connection with papa’s simile. It must seem very strange to you at first. I only hope it will not all seem very disagreeable to you at last. I am so thankful you are not a foreigner ; I do hate foreigners. Your predecessor was a foreigner. Good heavens, how delighted I was when one day she tore up her music, and boxed papa’s ears ! He can stand a great deal ; but he did not like having his ears boxed and his face slapped ; so we got rid of Mademoiselle in double-quick-time. There never was an allegro movement so cleverly performed in this house.’

‘What was the matter—could not she learn ?’ I inquired.

‘She would not learn,’ answered Miss Gretchen. ‘Papa said she might have done anything, if she had only been industrious ; but she was lazy to her very bones—lazy, and greedy, and ill-tempered. She once boxed my ears, but she did not attempt it a second time. She wanted me to wait upon her, and I would not. She used to call us all devils, as calmly as if there were nothing unusual in such a mode of address. But I am keeping you up. I will leave you now, and come back in a quarter of an hour to see if you will drink that cup of tea I doubt not my mother is already brewing.’

‘Tell me,’ I said, detaining her, ‘tell me before you go, what you meant down-stairs when you remarked I was to have all I wanted to-night. Is Herr Droigel very, very severe ?’

‘Papa is not cross, if that is what you mean,’ the girl replied. ‘He lets me do as I like. He would let you do as you like, if

you did not, unluckily for yourself, happen to have a voice ; but as you have a voice, you will find him—how shall I put it ?—strict. You will have to serve your voice, if you can understand me ; eat for it, drink for it, walk for it, sleep for it, work for it ; and if you are not particularly fond of your voice, you may find all this slightly tiresome. For me, I am humbly thankful to the Almighty for not having given me the slightest ear for music.'

'I heard your father once make the same remark,' I observed ; 'but he implied that you were not so satisfied about the matter as he.'

'My father is one of the most truthful men living,' said Gretchen, calmly ; 'to quote his own expression, he is transparent ; but still you must not take everything even he says literally. There, I knew how it would be,' she continued, rushing to the door as a mellow cry of 'Gretchen, mine own child !' came up the staircase. 'That is to tell me the Bud must not be exhausted by conversation,' she explained, and having so explained left me at last alone.

Herr Droigel was as good as his word. He did not put harness on, and begin to drive me immediately. He took me to see the sights. We went up the river and down it. We made so regular a business of pleasure, that I soon got tired, and was glad when lessons began in earnest.

But oh, what those lessons grew to be ! what that study of music proved ! what the cultivation of my voice really meant !

Most persons have an idea that nothing is so easy as to sing a song ; unless, indeed, it may be to write a book. When they hear of some prima donna receiving so much a note, they shake their heads and say—

'People who work hard cannot earn money so easily as that.'

Whilst the fact is, there are no people who have to work so hard as those who earn their bread by discoursing sweet sounds.

It is, indeed, utterly impossible for any person outside the musical profession to form the faintest idea of the drudgery

which must be gone through before even a small success can be achieved. The uninitiated hear what the *prima donna* is paid per note, but they can never know what that note cost the *prima donna*.

No one either can ever know what my notes cost me ; the toil, the vexation of spirit. I shudder when I recall those lessons. I sicken at the memory of Herr Droigel's despair when he found that, physically, I was unable to bear the burden of the tasks he put upon me. I seemed to dread once more the sound of the word 'health,' and, ill with nothing but utter exhaustion, I lie again on my bed, with Gretchen bathing my temples with *eau-de-cologne*, and renewing her thanks to Providence that it was not of the least use her father ever attempting to teach her to sing.

And yet, in spite of all the work and all the hardship, I was happier than I had ever been in my life before. I drank-in music, and I was content. The vague longings, the yearning for something my lot did not hold, were satisfied at length.

Youth makes little account of want of bodily comfort, so long as heart and soul are filled. My heart was not empty. I had long letters, tender and wise, from my uncle. I made friends, as he prophesied would be the case. I grew very fond of Gretchen, and she at length grew so fond of me, that out of pure love she brushed her hair, and kept her shoes up at heel, and mended her dresses, and would have made the house tidy, had father or mother wished it to be so.

But neither father nor mother had the slightest desire for anything of the kind.

They were never happy if by chance their surroundings were in order. They rejoiced to live in a perpetual hurricane of disorder. Herr Droigel did the cooking. When he was not eating, smoking, singing, or teaching, or sleeping, he was in the kitchen. Madame Droigel did nothing. During the entire time I lived in that house, I never saw her even attempt to do anything, unless, indeed, to assist in laying the cloth.

The rooms were kept in order, or supposed to be kept in order, by a succession of small maids-of-all-work, who might,

judging from their innate depravity, capacity for breakage, grimy countenances, and unkempt locks, have all been eggs out of one nest.

Jane went, and Sophy succeeded, and Kate followed after ; but there was no difference, except in name. They were all, as Madame Droigel, who set them such an admirable example, remarked, 'idle sluts'—in vituperation, Madame's English was remarkably strong.

Once we had a grown-up servant—trim, active, cleanly ; a being so superior to all who had gone before, that, hearing Gretchen's report, I went down into the basement to have a look at her.

There she was, actually scrubbing out the pots. For thirty six hours we retained that treasure. At the end of that period she had threatened to pin the dishcloth to Herr Droigel's coat-tails. She had requested Madame Droigel to place her on board-wages, in order that she might procure some food fit for a Christian (meaning herself) to eat. She had informed Gretchen that where she lived previously, when young ladies wanted anything they rang for it, and did not scream after servants as she did ; whilst she took the duster, wherewith it had been my wont to employ my few leisure minutes in the mornings, into her possession, intimating at the same time her opinion that I had enough work of my own to do, without interfering with hers.

As for Gretchen and myself, we would thankfully have complied with her wishes, and told her so, with a deference which, I think, touched her feelings. But Herr Droigel could not consent to leave her in undisputed possession of the kitchen ; and Madame was hurt at her expressed opinions on the subject of foreign messes. So she departed, and we returned to our Janes and Sophias and Kates.

Herr Droigel that evening prepared for our delectation a dish more unspeakably nasty than it had yet fallen to my lot to taste ; whilst Madame his wife donned—probably in honour of being mistress in her own house once more—a black-silk dress so hopelessly denuded of hooks, that even she was fain to hide its gaping back from sight by means of a faded crape shawl.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

So far from finding that the lapse of time reconciled me to the peculiar habits of Herr Droigel and his wife, intimate association with them only produced a feeling of greater and ever greater amazement.

For days and days together, Herr Droigel, so active a pedestrian at Alford, would not stir outside the hall-door ; and when his 'stay-at-home fit,' as Gretchen called it, was on him, he never thought it necessary to wash or shave, or even dress.

I have been privileged to see that now distinguished Doctor of Music in the very scantiest raiment a human being could well go about in—as near nudity, in fact, as our absurd civilization would permit.

At first I was surprised and shocked, if so strong an expression befits the circumstance ; but I soon began to consider that if Herr Droigel did not mind his *déshabille*, why should I ?

He was the person who ought to have felt disconcerted ; and if, so far from being disconcerted, he revelled in it, would it not have been presumptuous for me to set up my judgment in opposition to his ?

Once—it was late on an autumn afternoon—a brougham drove up to our door, and a gentleman alighted, who was shown into the drawing-room, and who gave a name to the servant which was evidently unfamiliar to my master.

With many groans, and Gotts, and Himmels, the Professor betook himself to his bedroom, whilst Gretchen rushed down-stairs for warm water, and Madame hurried up-stairs, rending her dress on a nail by the way, to look her beloved out clean linen.

He had shaved himself ; he had got on a pair of black trousers ; he was about to incase his feet in boots, when suddenly a cheery voice resounded through the house.

‘Droigel ! Droigel ! why the deuce don’t you come to me ? I can’t wait for you all day.’

As when a soldier, preparing to meet an enemy, hears the familiar watchword, beholds an accustomed uniform, changes his defensive attitude, so the Professor, at sound of that voice, dropped his boots, resumed his slippers, and in all the glory of a clean shirt, destitute of a collar, and wristbands still unbuttoned, darted from his room.

Not for me is it to chronicle the expressions with which that usually peaceable man prefaced his sentence. Suffice it to say that neither Gott nor Himmel had any part or parcel in them.

‘Why did you not say who you was, that so I need not to have dressed ?’ he asked, and there was an agony of reproach in his voice, which seemed, however, to fail in touching his hearer’s sympathies.

‘Dressed ! by Jove, I don’t know about that !’ was his visitor’s reply. ‘Seems to me you couldn’t have much less on, unless you were in your birthday garments.’

Then the door shut, and Gretchen, standing on the top of the first flight of stairs, and I, standing in the hall, burst into a peal of laughter, which I afterwards knew elicited from Herr Droigel the remark—

‘There goes my babies ; they must have their laugh at the fat papa.’

It always seemed to me a pity that Madame Droigel did not join together, or permit us to join together, two of her black quilted petticoats for her husband’s use. Had she done so, I am sure he would have donned the garment with a charming unconsciousness of any ridicule which might appear to attach to it, and waddled about the kitchen in a state of intense delight. As it was, he prepared various delicacies for our table in a dress, or rather undress, the particulars of which would scarcely bear reproduction here, and which filled me, as I have said, with an ever-increasing sense of amazement.

Cannot I, glancing over my shoulder from the square piano-forte before which I was seated, see him now, ay, and hear him, as from the fire-place, where he is concocting some particularly

nasty culinary mess, he bellows an entreaty for me to mind what I am about, or a malediction on any specially pernicious vocal habit into which I have fallen.

Once again I behold the worn, greasy, shabby gray dressing-gown fastened round his ample waist by a cord formerly composed of strands of many colours, but now faded and dirty ; the slippers, old friends, old and trusted, well tramped down at the heel, are a visible presence ; over them hang socks, put on but never pulled up ; and then, towering above all, the self-made drawbacks of his life, and his belongings, and his dress, rises the large grand head, which holds so much knowledge, worldly and otherwise, and has, to my thinking, made so little out of it all.

His intellect, his genius, his art, were sufficient to invest even that untidy house with a charm of novelty and romance.

His disquisitions on disinterestedness, upon the abominable characteristics of selfishness, upon the detestable nature of people who told untruths, delighted, and I regret to say, imposed upon me.

Viewing his character calmly, after the lapse of years—looking at him through the gray-tinted neutral glasses with which Time kindly provides most of us—I think Herr Droigel's three strong passions were love of eating, love of ease, love of money. I do not believe any one predominated over the other. If he had a fourth passion, it was one so characteristic of all his compatriots, that it seems scarcely worth mentioning ; he loved diplomacy.

So to speak, he never passed through a gate when there was a gap in a hedge he could creep through, or a roundabout path he could traverse ; but then this is characteristic of his nation. Perhaps it is one cause of their supremacy at the present moment. Heaven grant it may be a very proximate cause of their downfall hereafter—the downfall of the nation at large, as it has proved over and over again of individuals composing that nation !

As for Madame Droigel, she was extracted from a depth of insufficiency which no pure German could, so far as my knowledge of the race extends, hope to fathom or understand.

She was the daughter of German parents, born in England—

parents hard-working, but destitute of brains. Madame Droigel lacked both brains and the capacity for hard work ; and the result was the woman in whose house I became domesticated.

From this pair was eliminated Gretchen—a young lady who, like her father, loved ease, and who, when I first knew the Droigels, was fast following in the footsteps of her mother.

Out of the house, indeed, her apparel was gorgeous. She arrayed herself in the height of the fashion, whatever that fashion might chance to be. She affected the showiest colours, and was, indeed, in all respects, a very dashing and conspicuous young person.

Indoors, however, she was down at heel, collarless, untidy, grimy, until, as has been stated, out of pure love for me, she began mending her ways and her stockings, put in the typical stitch in time, dressed herself completely even for breakfast, and improved her general appearance so greatly, that Herr Droigel began to survey her critically, and to exclaim regretfully—

‘ Hadst thou but possessed a voice, Gretchen, thou mightst have played at foot-ball with the world.’

‘ But I do not care for foot-ball,’ answered easy-tempered, unambitious Gretchen. ‘ Here is Annie, she shall achieve fame, and earn money enough for us all.’

‘ Ah, child, our loved Annie has a sweet voice, and can sing her little songs when she is in the mood adorably ; but with your presence, ach, Himmel, what might you not have done ? ’

‘ Gone on the stage, I presume,’ interrupted Gretchen. ‘ Gone on the stage and screamed before the footlights. That is not my idea of happiness at all. I want to find somebody who has ten thousand a year, and get him to marry me, that I may have what I wish, and do nothing for the remainder of my life.’

And Miss Gretchen tossed up her head, clothed with its German glory of golden plaits, having thus explicitly stated her desires, whilst Herr Droigel, after taking once more a critical inventory of her charms, and considering how irresistible they would have proved in conjunction with a good voice, uttered a dolorous ‘ Ach ! ’ and relapsed into silence.

Not by any direct sentence, not indeed by any sentence at all, did Herr Droigel gradually impress upon me the fact that my 'presence' was not one calculated to curry favour with the British public. I was quick enough to understand that though the life of a singer of ballads had once been the extent of his hopes for me, still a brief period ensued when he fancied London and himself might have stimulated and gratified me to aspire to higher flights still.

And he had to abandon that expectation. I should never be more than a singer of songs—able to earn my five or ten guineas for an evening—and then 'evenings are not always,' sighed Herr Droigel.

'God is good,' he explained to me once; 'but he does not give to us everything we want.' And then I fully understood that my master believed my voice and myself were mismated—that to put it differently, but more plainly, had Herr Droigel been intrusted with my creation, he would have put my voice into Gretchen's body, or *vice versa*.

In any event he would have conjoined the two.

As for Gretchen, she was, and it pleases me to add, is one of the most amiable of created beings. Go to her when you will, see her under any circumstances, meet her in any place, she is still charming. She is one of those fortunate beings who, having accepted no responsibilities, never meets you with an anxiety, present or anticipated, clouding her brow.

Golden hair, blue eyes, transparent complexion, good features, a large well-developed person, and a calm heifer-like demeanour, have in her case done wonders.

If she failed to reach the desired ten thousand a year, at least she has done remarkably well in the matrimonial market.

Only the other evening we sat together in her dressing-room—her maid was dismissed—her long fair hair floated placidly over her shoulders; the dear papa we knew was smoking down-stairs, and helping the esteemed husband to empty the remains of a specially esteemed bottle of cognac.

Peace reigned—the children, under the charge of a highly-

paid and respectable nurse, slept the sleep of infancy, and Gretchen, large and calm, surveyed with complacent eyes the fire another's exertions had kindled and kept lighted for her.

'A charming home this is, mia cara,' I remarked.

'Yes,' she answered ; 'and but for you I should never have called it mine. When I think of that home and myself as you first knew it and me, I blush ; but you have been the most loyal of human beings ; otherwise——' and she paused in a sort of horrified silence.

She will never read this book ; she never reads anything, neither does her husband ; thus far and a great deal farther they are well mated, and therefore I think I may say, without fear of contradiction, I made Gretchen Droigel.

All unwittingly, I, who had myself risen from so poor an estate, taught her *les convenances* of society—taught her that people who wish to conquer the world must consider its prejudices ; instilled into her a belief that unkempt hair and careless dress are not merely untidy but impolitic ; that in this world very few people in any rank can afford to be eccentric or natural, if their naturalness separate them in the smallest degree from their fellows.

I have been loyal to Gretchen. Through me she made her mark, and has retained it unmolested ever since. She is not the bright, piquant companion I can recollect. Her sense of humour is blunted. Her ideas of propriety are strong. Altogether I do not care much for Gretchen now, and am always glad when her visits terminate. Nevertheless, artistic though my nature may be (she tells me it is so), I am sufficiently English to remember old times, and remembering, I am always rejoiced to see the carriage appear which is to bear Juno and her offspring away from my door.

It seems to me I breathe more freely even in a worse atmosphere. It seems to me I ought never to have been admitted into decent society, seeing how impatient I feel when the feet and the inches of social propriety are laid in measurement against my daily life.

The course of the existence I have to record, however, is not that of Gretchen. It is mine own.

Mine own as it was then—clipped of its sentiment, shorn of its romance, by Herr Droigel.

If I walked, he or Gretchen must accompany me ; if his friends called, he expected I should retire from the room ; if I went to church, he exacted a promise from me that I should sing no praises to the God who had been a very present help to me in trouble—a sufficient refuge in my earliest youth. Acquaintances of my own I had none : he gave me no chance of making any. I practised in a back room. I exercised my voice to the dismay of right and left neighbours who were undiscriminating.

During the time I lived with Herr Droigel, man did not hear, nor woman either, any of my ‘little songs.’ I know now that the Professor dreaded lest some one should snatch me out of his hand and reap the harvest he designed to garner for himself ; but then I accepted in good faith his statement that he feared my getting into bad habits, that he did not wish me to exert my voice unduly.

‘When it is strong, quite strong, and you are strong also, then let us take the public into our confidence ; but till then we must be careful so much.’

Nevertheless, spite of all his caution, the fact that one of Herr Droigel’s ‘babies’ was destined for the musical profession oozed out. Curious glances began to be cast upon me ; inquiries were made concerning me, as thus—

‘I say, Droigel, who is that girl you keep so much in the background ? She is not your child, I know. A wonder, eh ?’

‘She is mine child by adoption,’ the Professor answered ; ‘and she is a wonder of goodness and amiability. She is alone in the world except for me and my wife and Gretchen, and an uncle so kind, so true. Poor little Annie !’

Whereupon his visitor burst into a fit of laughter, and exclaimed, ‘Bravo, Droigel ! You are inimitable ; but what is the use of trying to humbug me ? You are teaching the girl to sing, I suppose, and expect to make a pot of money out of her.’

This Gretchen told me—this and other speeches like unto it—adding on her own account—

‘I am dying to know when the curtain is to draw up, and

the performance begin. Never before did I take the smallest interest in one of papa's pupils ; but I would give anything to see you stand up and sing before thousands of people. I should be as nervous as mamma when she hears a mouse in the room.'

'Has Herr Droigel had many pupils ?' I inquired.

'Lots,' was the answer—'lots that he has improved and finished ; but not many from the beginning, like you. Once he picked up a pearl—Madame Baroilhe. She was a wonder, I believe. I was a tiny bit of a thing at the time, and can scarcely remember her. But she made all our fortunes. She lost her voice the third season she appeared, and had to leave the stage ; but papa had got a quantity of money out of her voice before that. We lived in a very different house from this then. Do you know we were once quite rich ? But papa speculated, and lost all he had. He is always making and losing. If you turn out a success, he won't be in the least better off at the end of five years.'

'Gretchen, suppose I should not be a success, what would your father say then ?'

'He would never forgive you,' she answered ; 'and for that matter, neither, I think, should I ; for my heart is set on your achieving a triumph. But you mustn't be afraid. Papa knows what he is about ; and he would never have taken you on the terms he did, had he not been certain you would do well both for yourself and him. Of course, as you are not being trained for the stage, you will never make a success like Mademoiselle ; but papa's idea is, I fancy, to make you sing in oratorios and those sort of things. You will see if I am not right.'

And so she went on chattering, quite unconscious that the desire of my heart was to sing on the stage, to utter those heart-thrilling notes I listened to with bated breath when uttered by others ; for at last Herr Droigel had fulfilled his promise, and taken me to the Opera.

Never shall I forget that night. Three years I had been in London, and for some reason, which is still a mystery to me, my master, whilst always expressing his intention of giving his 'little ones' a treat, seemed to make a point of deferring that

treat as long as possible. One day, however, he begged 'dear mamma' to make herself and us as handsome as possible.

'We go to hear Serlini,' he explained ; 'and mine old pupil and still good friend Givorna has sent me a box. Ha, Miss Annie, what say you now !—long-wished for come at last. Such a treat ! such an actor ! such an actress ! and, ach Gott, such singers too ! We must all put on our best bibs and tuckers. Ah, you laugh ! You are always laughing at Droigel. You are a naughty girl, Miss Annie, for all your grave face and demure little ways—always making fun of the fat old master who is teaching you so much.'

'Don't get pathetic, papa,' said Gretchen, 'or you will make Annie cry.' And then she took him round the neck, and kissed first one cheek and then the other, after which she executed a *pas seul* round the table, finishing her performances by waltzing me out of the room, in order to look up our finery.

'Ah, Heaven, what a pity ! what a pity !' said the Professor, following her movements with a melancholy pride.

'That I have no voice,' panted Gretchen, pausing. 'It is a pity ; for had I possessed one, I might have become another Serlini.'

'Ach, no,' answered her father ; 'there is but one Serlini ; there will never be no other.'

'The mould was broken up after she was created,' remarked Miss Gretchen, gaily. 'There is but one Serlini, and Herr Droigel is her prophet and Annie her worshipper.'

'Will one of you two girls sew my body into my blue-silk skirt ?' asked Madame, in her broken English. Born in the country, she had never learnt to speak its language any better than her father and mother had done before her.

'Yes,' answered Gretchen ; 'one of us two girls—Annie, to wit—will perform the surgical operation you have mentioned.'

Not without difficulty did we succeed in so dressing Madame as to render her presentable ; but when at length her toilette was completed, and Herr Droigel admitted to a private view, his satisfaction could only find expression in a Babel of language I dare not attempt to reproduce.

She was charming ; she was beautiful as in her first youth. No one would believe she could ever have chosen such a fat awkward husband as poor Droigel.

Proud girls were we as we looked and listened and laughed. Happy girls when, dressed in all our best, we squeezed ourselves together as Herr Droigel's huge body, coming into the cab, tightened us up as though he were a cramp.

'I don't believe it is real—I don't believe we shall ever get there,' said Gretchen, looking radiantly pretty.

She but expressed my feelings. I kept tight hold of her hand, and had to say perpetually to myself, 'I am going to the Opera,' in order to feel I was not dreaming. I had done the same thing in Fairport years and years before. Had time-gone back ? Was I walking once again within sound of the murmuring sea ? For a moment as I closed my eyes the illusion seemed perfect, but when I opened them, wet with tears, I beheld the thronged streets, the bright gaslight, the thousands hurrying this way and that.

The night which came back to my memory so vividly had wrought all this change in my life. From quiet Lovedale to London was a transition not more extraordinary than that I, the country-bred child, reared in such seclusion, fenced round with prejudices and loving strictness, should be now in training for a public singer !

Let speculators build as many new opera-houses as they please, they will never raise another edifice so dear to the hearts of a former generation as Her Majesty's.

It is all very well for young and flippant writers to speak of the Dust-hole in the Haymarket, but can they crowd another house with the memories and the traditions it contained ?

What actors and actresses have trod those boards ! what floods of melody have been poured forth under its roof ! what stories, sinful and tragic and pitiful, have been played out behind the scenes ! what gay, and witty, and sorrowful, and gloomy, and distinguished, and wicked men and women have jostled each other in the crush-room !

It was fitting that when the time came for the old house to

pass away, fire should have been the agent for its destruction.

Who that loved Her Majesty's—and what veteran opera-goer failed to do so?—could have endured to behold the building torn limb from limb by callous workmen, its properties sold, its stage pulled down, its scenery carted off, its boxes sold for fire-wood?

'Better so,' I believe, must have been the second thought of every man and woman who had memories connected with the dear old opera-house. The first thought naturally was one of regret; the next, that as its days could not in any event have been long in the land, it had perished so gloriously.

Fairyland had the poor little theatre at Fairport seemed to me that evening when I entered it with my uncle.

If there be a seventh heaven of fairyland, I entered it that night with Herr Droigel. To others the gilding and the paint might have seemed dingy and the curtains faded, but to me they were fresh, and bright, and beautiful.

We were all kings and queens and princesses in our box. Herr Droigel arrayed so carefully that it seemed impossible to associate him and the word *déshabille* together; Madame clad in many colours, a style of costume which suited her; Gretchen and myself simply attired as became our youth, but still dressed for the evening, and looking as well as our neighbours.

The opera was *Les Huguenots*. Shall I ever forget it as then performed, ever lose the memory of how Serlini sung, and Givorna sustained his part? To the end of my life I shall recollect the clapping, the encores, the bouquets, the frantic applause which greeted the prima donna.

'Ah!' exclaimed Herr Droigel, as she at length retired from the stage half concealed by flowers, 'that is a life worth living for the only life worth having.'

As for me, I could not speak; my very soul seemed to have left me and gone out to seek that woman who, marvellous when I first heard her, had since developed powers which rendered Herr Droigel's remark of there being but one Serlini no exaggeration.

There never was her equal before, there never will be her

equal again. Voice, culture, passion, pathos, beauty, grace, all these she combined in her own person.

She has gone, and left no copy of herself. Never for ever will another Serlini cross an English or any other stage.

After that night it so happened that other tickets were sent, and we went twice again that season to the Opera. Then Herr Droigel remarking that late hours and a summer in London were destroying his sweet Annie's good looks, we suddenly packed up and transported ourselves to the sea-side.

There, however, my lessons still continued. We had a detached cottage and a hired piano, and my master divided his time between composing music and finding fault with me.

'Depend upon it,' said Gretchen, who understood the signs of her father's barometer, 'he intends to bring you out next season. He is not quite satisfied as to the prudence of his determination, but he has resolved to risk the plunge.'

'But if I should fail,' I suggested.

'Psha!' she replied; 'you won't fail unless you wish to do so. We all know that.'

'But it is so soon,' I murmured.

'It is like having a tooth out,' she replied; 'the sooner the operation is over the sooner you will be at ease. Listen to me, Annie,' she went on. 'You are one of those absurd girls who ought to have a father and mother and half a dozen brothers and sisters to maintain, in which case you would be so anxious to earn money that you would forget yourself and everything except money. Now you profess to be fond of me, and I believe you are; therefore, the moment you get up to sing, think, "I am singing for Gretchen. If I succeed she will be happy; if I fail, times will not be good with her." Say to yourself, "I am singing to give Gretchen a *dot*; if I get an encore, that means happiness and ease to the Droigels. They have invested in me—if I turn out a poor affair, they lose both hope and money; whereas if I succeed we—they and I—will be rich and prosperous and content."

When I think over all this now, it seems to me that a portion at least of Herr Droigel's mantle had fallen upon Gretchen,

that, like her father, she was wise in her generation ; and yet, why should I blame the girl ? She was getting, I doubt not, weary of comparative poverty, and she looked to me as a certain deliverer.

Still, if I failed ! That idea was ever present with me whilst practising and taking my lessons ; but whenever I could sing out the songs I fancied, all alone by myself, no doubt of success entered my mind.

Chafed and worn and mortified, and scolded by Herr Droigel, music was one thing. Sung as I listed—without teacher or critic—it proved quite another.

And in this way I was, one afternoon, screaming out to myself an *aria* from the last opera we had heard—shrieking, declaiming, in my own poor manner travestying the brilliant prima donna.

The house, to all intents and purposes, I had to myself—for there was only one woman in it, and she nearly deaf.

Two days previously, Herr Droigel had, with many protestations of regret, and assurances of his unalterable attachment for us individually and collectively, left our temporary home for London.

Madame and Gretchen were out boating, and I was doing what I dared not have done had the Professor been within sound of my voice, trying over song after song, humming the easiest parts, skipping the most difficult, slurring over brilliant passages—‘ganging my ain gait,’ in fact, in defiance of all commands, entreaties, and injunctions ; and it is needless to add, enjoying myself thoroughly.

At length I came to one of the most lovely of operatic melodies—one which I had heard sung by Madame Serlini a short time before we left town.

As I played the symphony, every tone of voice, every turn of expression, seemed to come back to my memory ; and flinging aside the repression I always felt when singing to Herr Droigel, I broke out with a power of voice and a strength of passion to which I had never before given utterance since I left Alford.

When the last note died away, as it was intended to do, in

almost a sob, Herr Droigel put his head through the open window, and said—

‘ Go on.’

Instead of going on, I jumped up from the piano, upset the music in my fright, and was essaying to collect the scattered sheets when my master entered the room.

‘ Go on,’ he repeated ; ‘ if you can sing like that, always sing the same—do you hear—repeat that for me similar once again.’

He might as well have told me to stand on my head.

‘ What is the matter with you, child ? ’ he exclaimed. ‘ What are you trembling about ? Why for do you fear Droigel ? Am I a monster that you shake and shiver ? Have I beat you ? have I spoken hard words to you ? have I not been kind to you as to Gretchen ? Come, tell me what it is I have done that you can sing well the moment my back is turned, and then, when I do show myself, you turn white, as if you did see one ghost.’

‘ When I am singing to you,’ I answered, ‘ I feel I am always going wrong.’

‘ And so you do go wrong often, and it is my right to tell you that ; but because I do tell you, that is no reason why you should shut up your voice in a box, and only let it out through one tiny hole. Come here, close to the light—stand—so—that will do. I want to look at you.’

And he did. He looked at me from head to foot ; he measured my inches with his eye ; he mentally criticized my figure, which must, in comparison to his, have seemed about as slight as a slate-pencil ; he gazed thoughtfully at my face ; with his hand under my chin, he examined my features closely ; and then with a sigh he patted my shoulder, and said, sadly—

‘ No ; it would be a waste of power and time. For that a woman must have a presence, or she must have piquancy. If diminutive, she should be bright, and arch, and pert, and coquetish. At the bottom of that sort of success there is always a devil, and thou hast no devil, Annie. If we could put one into thee, all might be different. Bah ! what a stupid head I am to babble such folly ! Let us go out and have a walk in this de-

lightful air. Let us forget music and the world, and fancy we are back in happy Alford once again.'

As we paced along, the fresh sea-breeze blowing in our faces, Herr Droigel, anxious apparently to dissipate that feeling of restraint which a pupil always, I think, feels towards a teacher, and which increases instead of decreasing as time goes by, exerted himself to amuse and interest me.

He could talk well when he thought fit to drop his absurd mannerisms and to discourse like an ordinary human being, and he chose on that day to speak about subjects which had a great fascination for me.

He told me concerning his youth ; he described his birthplace ; we lingered together in foreign cathedrals ; he had much to say about the celebrated men and women with whom he had come in contact.

Never did I enjoy a walk more, and I was telling him so while we slowly climbed the hill on the top of which our cottage stood perched, when a small pony-chaise containing two persons, a lady and a gentleman, passed us.

Something in the lady's face seemed familiar to me. Something in mine apparently was familiar to her, for she said to her companion, without in the least lowering her tone—

‘Stop the pony, George, and let those people overtake us. I think I know the girl ;’ and turning round she stared at me fixedly for an instant before exclaiming, ‘Yes, it is little Trenet. What in the world are you doing here?’ And jumping to the ground she took both my hands in hers, saying at the same time, ‘You have forgotten me ; you cannot remember who I am.’

‘I have not forgotten you, Miss Cleeves,’ I answered ; ‘you are not changed in the least !’

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUTFLANKED.

‘AND you,’ retorted Miss Cleeves, ‘are not altered one atom. I do not believe you have grown an inch taller, and you are the same cold-blooded animal who used to sit on stones in the middle of the Love, looking like a limpet, all the while you were singing like a mermaid.’

Hearing this polite speech, the gentleman she called George laughed, and Herr Droigel executed a faint ‘Ha, ha !’ by way of second; and though the description of my former self conveyed in the young lady’s sentence was far from flattering, I could not help joining in the general merriment.

‘Come, you can laugh, that is a blessing,’ remarked Miss Cleeves ; ‘and, as it is an accomplishment of recent date, I must inquire who taught it to you. Now, Annie, have you forgotten all your pretty manners, for which you used to win such praise in days gone by ? Do you intend to introduce me to this gentleman, or must I introduce myself ? Who is he—your guardian, or your husband, or both ?’

‘Neither one nor the other,’ interposed the Professor ; ‘but Droigel, by adoption Miss Annie’s father, and your most humble servant.’

Miss Cleeves looked at him and at me sharply and curiously, then she said—

‘Pray, Annie, how long is it since you discovered an adopted father necessary to your comfort and well-being ? You got on very well without either a real or sham parent, when I knew you. Or can it be,’ she suddenly added, ‘that this urbane gentleman is your step-grandpapa ? Has Mrs Motfield——’

‘That sainted and most God-loved woman—’ Herr Droigel was beginning ; but I could not endure the drift the conversation was taking.

‘My grandmother is dead, Miss Cleeves,’ I said; ‘please, do not say anything more about her.’

‘Dead, little one! I am sorry,’ she exclaimed, and she put her arm round my neck. ‘George, take that ridiculous conveyance back to its owner, and leave me to find my own way to the Parade. I wish to discourse to this young lady about those “days of auld lang syne, when we pu’d the gowans fine.” That is a dear fellow. *Au revoir.*’

And she kissed the tips of her fingers to her cavalier, who, turning a smiling and handsome face towards us, raised his hat, and, obedient to the word of command, drove off.

‘And now, dear, tell me all about yourself,’ began Miss Cleeves. Then, ere I could reply by a word, she rattled on: ‘I have never been able to hear a sentence of you. My worthy relatives were dumb on the subject. Your uncle, whom I went to see, was “obliged by the affection I professed and the interest I displayed,” but considered that as the “ladies” objected to our intimacy, it had better cease. From that moment I have been a wanderer over the earth. I quarrelled with my bread-and-butter; I flung it, as the children do, butter-side downwards, to the end that it may be good for nothing when picked up. I left the Great House, where, if everything was very slow, it was also very sure. My mother inherited a small fortune, and I went home to help her spend it. Then—well, then—she died—with a glance at her black dress; ‘and I am now with the Dacres—that is George Dacre,’ and she nodded her head after the driver of the departing phaeton. ‘We are all here for the benefit of the sea-air and of sea-bathing. Between ourselves, I sometimes think Mrs Dacre proposed coming here in the hope that I would drown myself; she is so dreadfully afraid of the son and heir marrying me—fancy that—marrying poor insignificant me!’

‘And Mr Sylvester,’ I asked, ‘where is he?’

‘Oh, Sylvester is going to be Lord Chancellor, or something of that sort,’ she answered, with an uneasy laugh. ‘Fact is, little one, there never was in any respectable family such a kettle of fish boiled and served as that you prepared for our delectation

when you left Lovedale. I denounced the conspiracy—I said things to Miss Wifforde, and Miss Wifforde said things to me, that were very much *comme il faut'n't*; and then—well, then—to cut a long story short, the original scheme had to be abandoned, and Mr Syl left the Great House in order to make a name and some money for himself. He is still to inherit the place, I believe, if he behaves himself properly and turns out a good boy, and marries with the consent of his aunts. I always shall consider it a pity,' went on Miss Cleeves, meditatively, ' that I could not like him well enough to have a wedding. I am sure I shall some day do a great deal worse.'

'Perhaps Miss does not know her own mind,' suggested, the Professor.

She looked up at him with a queer twinkle in her eyes, and answered—

'Yes, grandpapa Droigel, I know my own mind on that subject, at any rate. And now, you dear adopted parent of orphans like Annie and myself, tell me what you purpose making of this innocent. Has she still a voice, and does she intend uplifting it, or have you a son to whose Teutonic mind her *dot* does not seem simply contemptible? Tell me, oh tell me, all about everything, ere I die!' and Miss Cleeves slipped her hand within his arm, and threw into her face an expression of the intensest interest.

'Miss Cleeves should go on the stage; she would make one actress so superb,' remarked Herr Droigel.

'You charming man! repeat that observation,' exclaimed the young lady. 'Go on the stage! It is "my dreaming by the night, my vision by the day—the very echo of my thoughts. My blessing"—et cetera. Go on the stage! I threaten my friends with that consummation; would to heaven I could only carry out my threat! Speak once more, dear friend—dear, if recent. Are you the Herr Droigel who writes those songs that fill one with rapture—that are a hundred, thousand, ten thousand times too spiritual and refined for the British public? Ah, no, it cannot be that I see you, of whom I have thought so often, at last in the flesh.'

There are situations which prove irresistible ; and to me the sight of Miss Cleeves standing in front of Herr Droigel, her hands clasped, her words coming thick and fast, and her eyes fastened on his ponderous person, as though it were the temple of some unknown god, was more than my gravity could withstand. Droigel himself accepted the position in the most perfect good faith, with the serenest amiability. Head uncovered, chest protruding, he stood there receiving Miss Cleeves's homage with an expression of such conscious worth, with a smile of such tolerant superiority, that at length, unable to control my merriment, I broke out into an almost hysterical fit of laughter.

‘There you go once more, Miss Annie,’ said the Professor. ‘Who has held up a finger now before the baby, and said to her, “Laugh, laugh at dat ?”’

‘I am very sorry——’ I was beginning, when Miss Cleeves cut across my sentence.

‘You are no such thing. You are, as you always were, a very ill-bred, ill-natured little monkey ! Herr Droigel, let us leave her to enjoy the fun all alone. Do talk to me ; tell me how you compose your songs. Do they come to you in the night ? do the waves whisper them to you ?’

I heard no more. She was walking him up the hill as fast as her legs could carry her, and Droigel, who loved his ease, was toiling and trying vainly to edge in a word of remonstrance sideways.

‘As for me, I sat down on the grass, the short velvety grass covering the common land through which the road had been cut, and laughed till I cried, and then laughed again.

I had seen those songs written ; I had beheld the throes of composition ; I had heard all the saints in the calendar invoked and all the fiends adjured, when the melody born would not realize his conception of it. Often as not inspiration came to him just as a saucepan boiled or a favourite mess was placed upon the table.

‘My child,’ he would then say, ‘one moment ;’ and the great hand would alight on the keys softly as a cat, and the mellow voice would hum a few bars, and thus a new air would come

into the world, which was afterwards improved and elaborated till full grown and fit to be sent out into society.

When I reached the house, Miss Cleeves had already got Herr Droigel down to the piano.

‘Hush-sh-sh!’ she said, as I softly turned the handle and entered our sitting-room; ‘hush-sh-sh!’ as though I had been in the habit of making riot and confusion wherever I appeared.

By the window stood Gretchen, puzzled; leaning against the instrument was Miss Cleeves, looking at the Professor as though she worshipped him.

When he had finished she drew a long breath.

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘if I could sing, if I only could!’ and she turned away, tears standing, I verily believe, in her eyes. ‘Herr Droigel,’ she went on, ‘I always feel religious when I listen to your music; how is that, I wonder?’

The composer professed himself unable to tell. Neither Gretchen nor I, had we been asked, could have afforded any assistance in the way of explanation.

‘I want to hear you, Annie,’ she went on, after a pause. ‘I want to know if the voice has grown, or if it has got less, as I verily believe you have. You need not put on that sanctified and penitential look,’ she continued, ‘because——’

The good reason which no doubt Miss Cleeves intended to add was lost to us for ever, for at this juncture Herr Droigel rose and closed the piano with a careful silence, which spoke his intentions more eloquently than any bang could have done.

‘You pardon me,’ he said, ‘but the dear friend of auld lang syne must not sing to-night; no—not for many nights. She is delicate, is this child Annie; and when the good doctor, that devoted Packman, spoke to me of her, he said, “It is a tender plant. If we wish it to blossom into perfect beauty, we must be careful to——”’

‘And since what period of its existence has the plant developed such exceeding delicacy?’ inquired Miss Cleeves. ‘To my ignorance she looks remarkably well. Fact is, I suppose, you do not want her to sing for me, and I must be content. There, am

I not good and submissive and everything most proper and contemptible in woman ?'

' You are charming,' said the Professor, bowing low. ' Your words are in my ears like the sound of a wild melody—strange, yet delightful. Gretchen, my angel, Miss Cleeves has promised to do this poor abode so great honour as to eat and drink under its roof. Wilt thou take her to thy room, mine own, and procure for her what she may require ? I hear the steady march of Gany-mede carrying her tea-tray.'

' And I hear the rattle of knives and forks also, thank heaven !' added Miss Cleeves. ' For your sake, Nannie, I have consented to forego the delights of dinner. Come with me, therefore, and make yourself amiable ;' and she held out her hand.

I was crossing the room to join her, when Herr Droigel interposed.

' One moment, dear Miss. I have something so much particular to say to my child.'

' Say it quickly, then,' advised Miss Cleeves, ' for I am going to wait till she is at liberty.'

And she sat coolly down on a chair by the doorway ; and taking off her bonnet, began swinging it backwards and forwards by the strings until our conference should have ended.

' Ah, ha ! young lady, you are so droll,' exclaimed Herr Droigel with a ponderous affectation of levity ; ' you wish to become acquainted with too much—you wish to know every one thing.'

' I think I should soon know a great many things, Herr Professor, if I lived with you,' said Miss Cleeves, calmly. ' As I have not that inestimable advantage, I am waiting patiently till you have imparted valuable information to Annie. Now, you maker and singer of songs, what is it ?'

' Every household has its little secrets,' said Herr Droigel.

' Doubtless, and its big ones too ; but I am certain any secret you may have to communicate to Annie can wait till " with sorrow you see me depart." Come, Annie, Herr Droigel is only practising on your credulity ; he has no secret, my child ;' and she swept me before her out of the room, and then turned and made a saucy little curtsey to the Professor.

‘Ach, Heaven !’ I heard him exclaim, ‘is she not adorable ? Such piquancy—vivacity so great—coquette—born actress—inconceivable self-possession ; but no voice—no voice ; and that dear Annie——’

‘Papa is composing a second book of Lamentations,’ remarked Gretchen, as she closed the door and ascended the stairs after us.

Miss Cleeves turned and looked at her, but said never a word.

No sooner, however, had we entered the apartment which we two girls shared, than turning to Miss Droigel, she began—

‘Gretchen—I think your father called you Gretchen ; I believe he also called you an angel ; but parents are apt to entertain delusions concerning the attributes of their offspring—Gretchen, my angel, Annie Trenet and I have known each other since the days when, figuratively speaking, we sucked barley-sugar and made ourselves sick with gingerbread. Naturally there are many touching incidents we desire to recall, but we feel they are too sacred to be spoken of publicly. Therefore, Gretchen——’

‘My dear Miss Cleeves,’ interrupted Gretchen, seating herself on the side of the bed as coolly as the visitor had taken up her position below, ‘Annie is to us a very precious lamb, and we cannot run the slightest risk of having her morals contaminated. You see what a transparent innocent family we are ; we want to keep Annie as one of ourselves——’

‘You will have to get her up to your own high standard of innocence first, girl with hair so golden and eyes so blue,’ said Miss Cleeves, cutting across her unfinished sentence ; ‘I understand the little scheme now, and in consideration of your father’s inconceivable abilities will bow to his decision. I comprehend that this “dear Annie,” to quote Herr Droigel, has developed the genius I first discovered ; and he fears that if her friends knew her real worth they might try to steal the diamond.’

‘Hardly, I think,’ said Gretchen, pillowng her ease-loving head upon soft round arms. ‘They would not know what to do with the diamond when they got it.’

‘Wise child of a wise parent,’ remarked Miss Cleeves, brushing her luxuriant hair with a quick impatient movement as she

spoke. ‘Your words are words that I shall ponder upon. What an understanding there must be amongst this amiable family ! Not a word spoken, and yet the youthful maiden knows her rôle as if by intuition.’

‘It is of no use trying to insult me,’ answered Gretchen lazily, yet defiantly, ‘I am but obeying orders. Annie’s voice is precious to us ; we want to make the most of it. So far the Droigels have been out of pocket over your friend. In the future, the Droigels hope to enrich themselves through her. That is the solution of the enigma.’

‘You are frank, my friend,’ said Miss Cleeves.

‘I am not false,’ retorted Gretchen, angrily, answering not the words of the sentence, but the sneer it contained.

‘You are fair,’ remarked Miss Cleeves, taking no notice whatever of Miss Droigel’s indignation, ‘and I admire beauty. Farther, I confess that by your sublime coolness you have vanquished even me. It would not have hurt either your father or you to let me chat for five minutes alone with a girl I knew when she was so high ; but as you think otherwise, I submit. Your uncle has sold you to the Egyptians, I see, Annie, and your friends must wait till you have achieved great renown before they behold your emancipation.—Let me know when the prodigy is to make her début, Miss Gretchen, and I will sell lots of tickets for you, and do that which is usually quite contrary to my principles—reward evil with good.’

‘You are very kind,’ observed Gretchen.

‘I am not generally considered an amiable individual,’ replied Miss Cleeves. ‘And now, Annie, you who were always a shuttlecock between contending battledores, and who will always be a shuttlecock till you develop a spirit and will and temper of your own, shall we go down to tea ?—Heaven, what hair you have !’ she went on, touching Gretchen’s plaits almost caressingly. ‘I know it is rude to make personal remarks, but I never did see anything so beautiful.’

To which compliment Gretchen made no reply, but stalked after us with uplifted chin and heightened colour, and a look in her eyes that said, It is of no use your trying to flatter and twist

me round your finger. I am not a pliable idiot like our friend Annie.

As she had done ample justice to our fare at Lovedale, so Miss Cleeves delighted Herr Droigel's heart by the relish with which she partook of the various dainties displayed on the tea-table. Much must have been new and strange even to her, but, undaunted, she ate her way to my master's good opinion.

'Ah!' he said, *à propos* to some observation made with Miss Cleeves's customary frankness on my appetite, 'if Miss Annie would only take food, what a future might she not spread out before herself!'

'She was always a dainty little wretch,' remarked Miss Cleeves, helping herself to a huge slice of German sausage.

'Don't you attend to the speaking of this dear friend,' said Herr Droigel to me, evidently thinking Miss Cleeves's style of conversation calculated to wound my sensibilities; 'she talks by contrary—she calls you "wretch" for "love."'

'I beg you will not attempt to translate my language,' answered Miss Cleeves; 'Annie knows very well what I mean. Before she is fit to go out into the world and hold her own against the people that inhabit it, she will have to get rid of her absurd sensibility, of her extra refinement of sentiment, of her fastidious notions of gratitude and affection, and other rubbish of that sort. At this present moment she is just about as fit to steer her own course, and take care of her own interests, as I should be to command a man-of-war. If she had ten thousand a year it might be all very well, though even in that case somebody would make a fool of her; but for a girl who has to push her own way, who has, in a word, to earn her living, such trustfulness and want of self-assertion is simply ridiculous.' And having thus delivered herself, Miss Cleeves asked for another cup of tea, whilst Herr Droigel stated his opinion that 'gratitude and affection were traits most beautiful in the character of a youthful maiden.'

'Beautiful, but useless;—worse than useless, pernicious,' persisted Miss Cleeves; and then she began to laugh, and said, 'Dear Herr Droigel, is it not fortunate for you that it is Annie with those traits in her character most beautiful, who has the

divine voice, instead of a worldly-wise young lady like myself ?'

'Who says Miss Annie has a divine voice ?' asked the Professor, with an anxiety he tried vainly to conceal.

'I say so,' replied Miss Cleeves. 'What is the use of making a mystery about the matter ? We all know the girl can sing ; that she could sing from the time she could speak. You are as well aware of that as I am.'

'Pardon me. Miss Annie is very dear to me ; but of her voice I say nothing except this, that voices do not always grow. That which is wonderful in a child is weak in a woman. As she sang when I first heard her, our Annie sings not now.'

'Then you must have made some terrible mess over your teaching,' said Miss Cleeves, bluntly. For a wonder she did not perceive the equivoque of Herr Droigel's sentence ; but I did, and exclaimed—

'No pupil ever pleased a master, Miss Cleeves. Put me on that stone in the middle of the Love with you for audience, and I will sing better than ever I did.'

'A miracle,' cried Miss Cleeves ; 'the dumb speaks !' Then glancing slyly at Herr Droigel, she added, 'It is a remarkable fact that the dumb always speak at the wrong time.'

'Annie could never speak at a wrong time for me,' said the Professor ; 'that dear child has only two faults—she eat too little, she talk too little.'

'I am not sure that talking too little is a fault,' disagreed Miss Cleeves. 'Supposing every one talked as much as you and I—why the world would be a perfect Babel.'

'I, dear Miss !' expostulated the Professor ; 'I—why, I am the most silent amongst men. If I had but your gift, I might then open my mouth. Then I could talk worth hearing !'

'Madame Droigel will be jealous if you compliment me,' said Miss Cleeves, calmly. 'She is aware that when I came here, I was in love with the composer ; when I leave, I shall have to make the sad confession that I am in love with the man.'

Madame Droigel laughed. 'I am so mooch used to dat,' she remarked ; 'the ladies are most in love with him. He is so goot to all.'

‘Thou flatterest, dearest one,’ said Herr Droigel, while Miss Cleeves turned upon me a look which was unhappily intercepted by Gretchen.

‘I at least do not flatter,’ said Miss Cleeves. ‘Seriously I do not know a modern composer whose songs stir my heart like those of Herr Droigel ; and farther, I always feel a respect for any one possessed of sense enough and will enough to out-match me. You and your charming daughter have beaten me to-day. I did want half-an-hour’s quiet talk with Annie ; but you and she said “No,” and I am forced to bow to your decision.’

‘What an intelligence !’ exclaimed the Professor, lifting his hand as though asking Heaven to join in his admiration of our visitor. ‘Of what avail are the clumsy devices of a novice like myself when pitted against an intuition so rare, a sense so subtle ? Dear Miss, of what use beating about the bush with you ? I will show you my soul. I will speak to you about this dear child Annie as if she was not present. Lovely is the affection of woman, touching are the little confidences of the sex ; but they are too stimulating for constitutions like that of my Annie. Her mental digestion, so to speak, is weak. Sentiment overweights her. The tender memories of that childhood, so calm, so beautiful, are better to lie slumbering. She is excitable, this little one. If she is to do any good for herself, or for her devoted Droigel, she must keep tranquil.’

‘So far as I am concerned, I have no objection to her keeping tranquil,’ said Miss Cleeves. ‘The only stipulation I make is, that when she sings in public for the first time you give me due notice, that I may be there to hear.’

‘It is a compact,’ said Droigel.

‘Let us shake hands on it then,’ suggested Miss Cleeves.

And the pair went gravely through this ceremony, after which Miss Cleeves remarked that it was time for her to be returning to the domestic hearth.

‘I myself will have the great honour and pleasure of accompanying you,’ said Herr Droigel ; and fortified by this assurance of safe escort, Miss Cleeves went up-stairs to put on her bonnet.

I did not offer to go with her. If Gretchen was to remain

as a spy upon me, Gretchen might do the honours of her father's house. Sulkiness was not a conspicuous trait in my character, but that evening I confess I felt sullen and aggrieved. For years I had worn fetters unconsciously ; the moment I recognized their existence, I rebelled at my bondage.

Evidently Miss Cleeves guessed at what was passing in my mind, for as she kissed me at parting, she whispered, 'I will see you alone in spite of them.'

Equally certain was it that Herr Droigel knew I was out of temper, for he patted my head and called me his dear child, and bade me take care of myself till he returned.

As for Gretchen, scarcely was Miss Cleeves well outside the doors before she opened her battery.

'Are all your friends like that?' she inquired.

'I do not know. Why?' I said, vaguely.

'Because, if they are, I cannot congratulate you on your acquaintance. Of all the ill-bred, insolent, rude, disagreeable people I ever met, that Miss Cleeves is the most unendurable. If she be a specimen of the upper ten thousand, deliver me from them!'

'I do not know anything of the upper ten thousand,' was my answer ; 'but I suppose there are some of all sorts amongst them, as in our own rank.'

'What business has she interfering with you?' continued Gretchen. 'What does she mean by sneering at my father?'

'I do not think she sneered at your father. If there be anything in the world Miss Cleeves admires, it is genius ; if there be anything she likes, it is a character out of the common ; and Herr Droigel has genius, and he is not in the least like anybody else that I ever knew.'

'Did she suppose I was such an idiot as to be deluded by her compliments? What can it signify to her whether I am pretty or ugly? I dare say she thinks herself far better-looking than I am.'

'I do not know. If she entertained such an opinion, I imagine she would have expressed it.'

'Because you know she is pretty,' went on Gretchen, anxious for contradiction.

'I think her beautiful,' was my reply.

'I do not know about that,' said the German Venus, disappointed; 'she certainly has a quantity of nice dark hair, and good eyes, and——'

'Do not let us dissect her, Gretchen,' I said, gently. 'You do not know exactly what she is to me—all I have felt about her since the first morning we met. Oh, if you could only see the place where she lived then!'

'Was it very grand?'

'Yes, magnificent,' I answered, in perfect good faith. Everything is comparative, and the Great House still seemed magnificent to me.

'Is Miss Cleeves very rich?'

'No, I think not; I do not know. She might have been, if she would have married as Miss Wifforde wished.'

'Why didn't she marry, then?'

'Really, Gretchen, it is impossible for me to say.'

'Did you ever see the "him?"' Was he old, was he ugly, was he ill-natured?'

'No, he was young and good-looking, and a vast deal better-tempered than she.'

'Then why on earth didn't she marry him?'

'I have not an idea. And now, if there is no other question you particularly want answered, I wish you would leave me alone.'

Having uttered this polite speech, I walked into the drawing-room and locked the door after me.

'Sociable one,' screamed Gretchen to me through the keyhole a few minutes after, 'mamma and I are going for a walk in the moonlight—will you come?'

'No,' I said shortly.

'Well, you might be civil, at any rate.'

'Do go for your walk and never mind me.'

'I hope you will be in a more amiable temper when we come back.'

I made no reply—I opened the piano and began playing.

‘You are going to exorcise the demon, is it not so?’ persisted Gretchen. But I drowned her farther utterances with a crash of chords, and finally she departed. Then once again I had the house to myself, then once again I could sing.

Not, however, as had been the case in the earlier part of the day. As I played, my irritation vanished. The demon, as Gretchen surmised, was cast out by the music, and tender thoughts and gentle memories came swelling up in my heart, as I recalled Lovedale and the happy days I had spent there—the happy, happy days of old.

Forgotten melodies recurred to me: ballads that had lulled me to sleep; songs that I had heard crooned in the hay and the harvest fields crowded back to my memory—unconsciously, almost, airs wild and plaintive took shape and form once more. With the bright moonlight flooding the room, I sang, in my girlhood, the songs of my earliest youth.

At this moment, moonlight ‘deep and tender’ is lying calm, soft, and silvery over lawn and garden, painting with unreal colours tree, and shrub, and flower; and as I write, that night, which held folded within itself the memory of so much of the past—the presentiment of so much of the future—returns in fancy once again, and is very present with me.

Long after Gretchen and her mother had come in from their walk, Herr Droigel re-appeared, joyous, not to say merry.

‘Where is my Annie,’ he said, ‘that I may talk to her of those friends so dear, so charming?’

Yes; he had gone into the house of this Colonel Dacre. That adorable Miss would take no refusal. She had dragged him into a mansion grand as a palace, into the bosom of a family distinguished as royalty. The mamma Dacre was a marvel of matronly beauty; the papa looked himself a soldier; and there were two young lady Dacres—and a friend so sweet, so lovely—all so sweet, all so lovely—and three sons.

The sons, and the daughters, and the friend had only one fault: they imagined they could sing.

‘Gott in Himmel !’ and the Professor clenched his hands, and ground his teeth, and stamped on the carpet.

‘And then,’ he went on, after a pause devoted to bitter memories of false notes and poor voices, ‘time anyhow, anyhow, but always wrong. And then they would have me to sing ; and that dear impassioned Miss almost embraced me—me, Droigel. She is unprecedented ; she is incomparable ; she speaks French, German, Spanish, Italian,—each one like a native himself. Such talent, such originality ! And she is writing a book, she tells me. And then the good Colonel would insist on my drinking some of the wine of my own Rhineland. Ah ! that *was* wine which Miss brought to me with her own hands, saying in her pretty airy way, she had much regret there were no leaves with which to crown me ; and they have invited us all to a picnic party, and I—foolish Droigel that I am—have promised that we will take ourselves there. How say you, Annie ? Will it not be pleasant for you to see the dear friend in all the unrestraint of holiday-making on the sea ?’

What answer I made to this is immaterial now, for we never went to that picnic ; we never tried the effect of holiday-making on the sea.

Next morning but one, Herr Droigel received, or said he received, a letter from some wonderful musical friend, which necessitated his leaving for London and carrying me with him.

We only remained there long enough to enable his friend to hear me sing one ‘little song ;’ after which we parted in all haste, and started, he and I alone together, for the Continent.

Never a pleasanter companion need youth have desired than Herr Droigel proved himself ; and yet I failed to enjoy my trip as much as would have been the case had I not entertained a strong suspicion that the journey was undertaken with no other object than to separate me from friends old or new.

One phrase used by Miss Cleeves perpetually recurred to me. Yes, I felt I was a shuttlecock, and that Herr Droigel was playing at battledore with me all by himself.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SLIGHT REMINISCENCE.

BELIEVING as he did in his 'heart of hearts' that there was but one country worth speaking about, and only one people possessing brains, character, and romance—the Germans—it was natural that Herr Droigel should extol that 'dear Albion,' and even profess that, spite of its fogs, its prejudices, its shams, and its luxurious style of living, he preferred it even to the beloved Fatherland.

'After all, Annie,' he said, as we approached London, 'the song is right, there is no place like home, be it ever so lowly.'

'But surely,' I said, 'you do not consider England home?'

'And why not, I pray you, little wise-head?' he inquired.

'Because it is not your home; because you are a German; because England can only seem to you like an inn, where you would never think of remaining for the whole of your life.'

'Who is it that says he always found his warmest welcome at an inn? There, never mind racking your young brains over the matter. He was a wise man, and, I doubt not, a good, or he never would have arrived at a conclusion so full of profound sense and delicate feeling. To return to your question, let me answer it by another, Where is your home?'

'Oh, Herr Droigel,' I answered, 'I never had but one home. I never can have another.'

'Your castle on the Love?' he suggested.

'Do not laugh at me,' I said; 'do not turn that home into ridicule. It was but an atom of a place, it was absurdly small; beside the Great House it looked a mere speck; and yet I loved that home as I can never love another so long as I live.'

Herr Droigel lifted his hat; he put on a solemn expression as if he were entering a church; he looked at me with tender

pity, and then he began addressing vacancy, as though I had been a subject, and he lecturing upon me.

‘What a child of nature is this dear Annie ! Her instincts, are they not those of the faithful animals, who, being dumb and without reason, rise superior to self-interest and to deceit ? Behold a house desolate, its master dead, its mistress far distant, its children scattered, its servants disbanded ; silent are its rooms, grass-grown its gardens, across deserted apartments the moon throws her ghost-like rays. And by the lonely hearth, where no fire now is lighted, where dust and ashes alone remain to tell of the fires that once have been, what do we behold ? A cat, with rough coat and staring eyes, the only creature that remains faithful to the memory of the past. Or see, once more, a grave in which man has been laid by man to rest till the judgment-day, or till some fresh tenant has need of the slender plot. Man has left man ; he has gone back to his pleasure, his business, his care, his money-making, his money-spending ; and the friend of old, the boon companion, the true comrade, the worthy citizen, the husband and son and father, exemplary in each relation of life, out of sight is fast growing also out of mind, and lies under his clay mound, with rank grass growing to right and left, at head and foot, alone. And yet not alone : stretched full length on the mound is the one friend whom death has failed to alienate—his dog.’

Here Herr Droigel puffed forth a sigh, and remained silent for a moment—whether engrossed in the contemplation of cat or dog his own consciousness had evolved, it is impossible for me to say. When he took up his parable again, it was but to apply its moral.

‘And as the cat and the dog in their attachment to place and person, so is this Annie of ours. She beholds fresh places—she visits fine cities, she sees countries beautiful as dreams of fairy-land—and still the true heart remains faithful to its first beloved—the cottage by the Love. Old friends pass away ; the grandmother, so good, so tender, has long received her message, and repaired herself to the mansions of the blessed : and other friends have arisen to help Annie along the path of life ; but Annie,

devoted like the dog, clings in memory to that grave across which the sunbeams glance through the branches of that memorable yew. It is lovely, and yet pitiful. Why were we created reasoning beings, if we permit instinct to rule our feelings and influence our actions ?'

Herr Droigel's philosophy had become wearisome to me in the course of time—as wearisome as his sentiment ; and for this reason, casting aside the question whether, in my divine instincts, I resembled his ideal cat and dog, I returned to the point whence we had started.

' You cannot,' I persisted, ' like England so well as your own country.'

' Mine own child,' said the Professor, ' when the frosty weather nips you up—soh !'—and he convulsed his mighty frame with a stage shudder—' which do you love best, a full grate or an empty ? When you are hungry—but hunger, I suppose, is a sensation unknown to Annie, who nibbles, nibbles, unlike Droigel, who eats plates upheaved—but put it that you felt hunger, should you not prefer a larder well garnished to one empty and swept clean ? The royal sirloin, the substantial side of bacon, the appetizing sausage, and the useful loaf would recommend their presence. Good ; so far you follow me. This England of yours, cursed in its climate and—well, in nothing else, we will say—blessed in its soil and its wealth and its position, its blazing coals, is bread and meat, board, lodging, and washing to me. I find not here ethereal blessings—I find no appreciative public, no wreaths, no garlands, no medals ; but in lieu thereof the cakes and ale which in my own land of poesy and romance might well be forgotten.

' Setting aside the fact of its being poisonous, a man cannot live on laurel. He needs the fat beeves, he delights in the fine wheaten bread with which London can supply him. It is true, and pity it is, that as regards Art the English are outer barbarians ; but what matter ? They know how to live, they know how to let live. There, Annie, much beloved, is the case in a nutshell, as your adage has it. A time there was—why should I, who wear my heart on my sleeve, seek to conceal anything ?—

a time there was when I, like you, had my aspirations. Just as you have often said in your innocent soul, "When I have gained fame, when I have made money, I will steal back to the home that mine heart sickens for," so, in similar manner, Annie, I have spoken to myself in my foolishness, and said—

"I will endure these fogs so fearful ; I will humour the Goths, and write down to please the false taste and tickle the diseased palates of the Visigoths ; I will haste me to be rich, and then return to mine own romantic land, and under the shadow of my vine and my fig-tree spend the remainder of my days."

'But money is about the only evil not to be acquired with rapidity ; and here am I fast hurrying down the hill of life, poor as when I first began to climb it. Yes, it has been a lost existence,' finished Herr Droigel, and his voice sank almost into a whisper. For a moment, perhaps, he deluded his fancy with the idea that circumstances and not himself were to blame for the result of his endeavours—that, given the chance over again, the end would not have proved such an utter failure as I must confess it seemed to me.

'I was always a simpleton,' he recommenced, after a pause ; 'the artist cannot help being one, out of his art. The one side of the artist's temperament is genius, the other folly. Looking back—thinking about what I am and what I might have been—I say, "Droigel, you were a fool, you are a fool, you always will be a fool." Then I curse my folly, and at the first opportunity am foolish again. Speak ! is it not so, Annie ?'

Whatever my private impression of Herr Droigel's character might be—and I am not aware that I had then formed any impression at all on the subject—I certainly was old enough and wise enough not to commit the impolicy of agreeing with his expressed opinions concerning his own imperfections ; therefore, finding he waited for a reply, I said I thought he was so far from being a simpleton, that he could do anything he chose if he only liked to set about it.

'Ah ! the sweet flattery of youth !' he exclaimed ; 'the only flattery which is honest and true ! How dear is it to those who are young no longer ! To a certain extent, however, you have

reason, Annie. If I were other than I am ; if, instead of being a child of nature, I were cold, calculating, worldly-wise ; in a word, if Droigel were not Droigel, but another ; then even now he might make a success. He might have his house large, well-appointed ; his brougham snug and swift ; his small boy covered with buttons tiny and bright ; his coachman clad in a modest livery of drab and silver. But *ach nein !* he suddenly exclaimed ; ‘away, dreams ! away, you mocking visions. By the light of reason I see Droigel walking still through the mire of the filthy London streets, or else squeezed up in a close omnibus, anathematized by his eleven fellow-sufferers ; no carriage, no high-stepping horses, no footmen, no nothing for Droigel till the end.’

He was so pathetic in his self-pity that I could not possibly avoid trying to comfort him with the hope of brighter days in store ; but my eloquence did not produce the effect it might, had imagination not conjured up a vision of Droigel settled down in a well-appointed house filled with decorous servants.

Would he clothe himself like other people ? would he, could he relinquish his culinary occupations ? What would a maid like Miss Hunter, for example, think of Madame’s style of dress ? and would not the necessary disorder of any abode which contained the Droigels fill with dismay the soul of any servant who ever took duster in hand ?

‘No, no, Annie,’ exclaimed my companion, ‘it is useless. I know what I know. The leopard cannot change his spots, and Droigel will be poor Droigel to the last page of the volume. The child of any other man than I would have been full of music, and Gretchen knows not one note from another. She cannot tell what is wrong or what is right. It is no sin to her. Music is a sense, and she has it not ; but consider the difference to me. ! There was a little baby brother once. Was he crying and I struck a few chords, the tears ceased to flow.’ (Herr Droigel had evidently not studied the habits of babies so closely as the science of thorough bass, hence this figure of speech.) ‘At three years of age he could sing, in his dear little way, ballads to perfection. He was a prodigy, a wonder ; but the angels

took him. 'We have all our graves,' added Herr Droigel with a reproachful glance at me, as though I had tried to monopolize the whole of them. 'Yes,' he repeated, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and communing apparently with his own absorbing sorrow, 'we have all our graves.'

A remark of this sort usually proves a dead-stop to conversation, and so it would in this case had ours been a conversation. But it was in truth almost a monologue, or rather, perhaps, a sermon preached to one auditor, a lecture delivered to a single listener. Having a good listener, Herr Droigel, after a moment devoted to sentiment, proceeded—

'Yes, it has been a lost life; and no one to thank for it but mine own idiotic self. Knowing what was best, I did what was worst. I never looked ahead; I thought wise thoughts and acted unwise deeds, like other men. There was my marriage, for instance. I ought never to have married, or at least not then. You need not look so frightened, Miss Annie; I adore Madame Droigel, as you know.'

'Yes,' I answered, relieved, 'I know you do.' Many a time had I marvelled to myself how Herr Droigel could marry such a woman as Madame, and it did surprise and almost frighten me to hear him touch the string I had so often tried to sound when alone.

My knowledge of mankind was at that period extremely slight, and I happened to be utterly ignorant of the astonishing fact that many men consider it a delicate way of ingratiating themselves with the other sex, to state or imply that they have matrimonially made the wrong selection; but even had I then been aware of this singular masculine propensity, I could not have felt more alarmed at the idea of Herr Droigel suddenly going mad and making love to me, than I did at the notion of his selecting me for a confidant.

The only married man with whom I had any previous acquaintance was my Uncle Isaac; and though his choice seemed to me as mistaken a one as imagination could conceive, still I knew no human being would ever hear from his lips confirmation of the theory.

For these reasons, had Herr Droigel struck me a blow, I do not think I could have felt more utterly stunned than I was by his remark.

Calmly, however, he proceeded to reassure me. According to him Madame Droigel was the personification to his mind of female excellence.

‘To you who know her,’ he said, ‘why need I dwell on her perfections? She is, you must confess it, unique; is it not so, Annie?’

Happy was I that he had found a point on which I could agree with him so thoroughly. Yes, Madame was unique.

With tears in his eyes Herr Droigel thanked me for my divine appreciation.

‘I knew you, so good, so amiable, must recognize those qualities in another. Think, Annie, since you became our second daughter, have you ever seen her temper once ruffled?’

‘No, I never have.’ I was still with him.

‘And then what adorable forgetfulness of self! Other women might say, ‘I must have this, I must have that;’ but my dear wife has no thought save for her most unworthy husband. Is it not inexplicable and touching?’

To which I replied that I supposed any one who knew him would be only too happy to study his wishes; but that still it was very nice of Madame to be so entirely devoted to his interests. Whereupon he smiled pleasantly, and said I was a little Jesuit.

‘And still, through all your pretty speeches, underneath your simple innocent manner, I see you are dying to know why I say it was a mistake for me to marry any one, more especially a woman so far, far too good for me as that angel who bears with me as her husband. I will tell you. The artist should never marry. His art should be to him father, mother, brother, sister, wife, child, friend. When he is created into this world he is to all intents married already. If he takes to himself a second wife, he commits bigamy; for, look you, the art never dies until the man does. He may think he has seen its last breath, that for him its last sigh has been uttered; but it will come to life again.

In an hour when the man or the woman least look for its appearance it will come to claim its own again.

‘A man cannot serve two masters,’ went on Herr Droigel after a pause, during the continuance of which I never attempted to speak. ““He cannot love God and Mammon.”” (Under which category he intended to include Madame I have not the faintest idea.) ‘To one or the other he must be unfaithful. The wife goes to the wall, which is a wickedness that ought not to be allowed to happen, or the beloved art is neglected, debased into a mere device for money-making. No; the artist should be free to devote himself, body, soul, spirit, to his mistress—so beautiful, so exacting; so generous if served faithfully; so revengeful if another be placed upon her pedestal. From his cradle he who is born with genius should be taught that the delights of earthly love are not for him. He should have no children crying out for bread, while he is treading the pathway to Fame. In my poor way,’ he went on, ‘what has my experience been? I have been forced to choose between my art and my family. Could I see the dear ones want merely because there was a future before me? Could I go on composing for a select posterity, whilst the men and women my contemporaries offered me gold to write some little nothing which should please their barbarous taste? Put yourself in my place, Annie; try to fancy your little feet slipped into my great shoes, and then say, married, was it possible for me to cast aside all regard for my dear wife, for my beloved children, and compass success at the result of their tears, their privations?’

To me there occurred only one possible answer to this inquiry: clearly, Herr Droigel, having elected to take Madame for better for worse, was bound to support her and his children; and I said so.

Still there was no divergence in our opinions; still I was able to agree with the views he advanced, only I could not imagine why he favoured me by advancing them at all, and at such length.

‘What, then, Annie,’ he asked, ‘do you take to be the moral of all this?’

'I suppose,' I answered, 'the moral is what you have already stated. You ought to have devoted yourself to art instead of to Madame Droigel.'

'True, so far ; but there is a wider moral which has been also expressed by me, and there is a particular moral which applies to you : no artist should marry. *You should not marry.*'

'I have not the least thought of doing so,' I answered, marvelling what on earth should have put such an idea into his head, for I knew no one who could possibly marry me. Dr Packman was the only single man of my acquaintance, and he might also have been my grandfather.

'Of course not. Now you have not ; at the moment, no ; but the moment will come, and the lover with it. Then remember my words. Marriage is not for you. An artiste you were born, an artiste you have chosen to remain. You cannot be wife and artiste too. I have seen genius stifled, happiness destroyed, two made most miserable, because people would not believe art and home to be incompatible one with the other. Do you believe, Annie, that the opinion I have expressed is true ? Say, my child. Answer without reserve.'

'I have no doubt you are quite right in your opinion,' I replied, sorrowfully. After all, though a girl's thoughts may not be running on marriage and lovers, there is something mournful in hearing that never, whether as girl or woman, is home to become a reality for her. Yet my small knowledge of life confirmed the truth of Herr Droigel's words.

At every turn had not music produced an element of discord between me and those I was most anxious to please ? Had I not been forced to smother my own inclinations in order to avoid grieving the only parent I ever knew ? Had not music driven us from Lovedale—rendered return to Fairport impossible ?

Yes, he was right. He sat watching me while I came slowly and carefully to the conclusion in my mind that I had already uttered with my lips.

'Never give up your art for the sake of a husband,' he went on, after a short silence. 'Believe me, no man is worth the sacrifice. Oh, I have seen so much of it ! I have known so

many hearts broken, beheld such bitter tears shed ; could tell of shipwreck so utter, so soul-rending, that if my Gretchen had genius, as she has beauty, I would rather see her in her shroud than in her bridal robes.'

' You do not take a very cheerful view of a singer's life,' I said, trying to speak lightly. ' Surely there must be some exceptions to so sad a rule.'

' You mean—I gather from your face rather than your words—that though so many are mismatched, yet some there must have been happily mated. I think not, unless the art was abandoned ; for if two possessed of genius marry, they are never satisfied. The idea that there is a fellow somewhere on the face of the earth for every human soul is pretty, if you like; but it is not true—at least, I think it is mere babble ; at all events, when the two souls meet they are likely as not married already, having grown impatient of long delay ; and that is bad—that is very bad ; married souls ought not to meet. Besides, it is often only fancy. They are not the right souls at all ; but they persist sometimes in thinking they are, and then a scandal arises, and afterwards they find out that the complementary souls—shall we call them ?—must still be wandering about some place trying to get paired. Bah ! Upon the whole, I do not think it a pretty fancy. It is uncomfortable, unsettled, a house on the sand. What is your notion about it ?'

' I have no notion,' I answered ; ' but I should not like my soul to consider it necessary to go searching after its double ; and I imagine it would be extremely unpleasant to have another soul playing through life at hide and seek with mine.'

' That is mine own Annie's sentence once more. She brightens up, she laughs, she makes faces mentally at hobgoblins, and defies them. She can be merry, though we talk of serious subjects. Serious subjects must sometimes be spoken of. I cannot tell why it happens that one I knew long, long ago has been in my thoughts to-day. I knew her young, I heard her sing when her voice gave promise, and again when the promise had been fulfilled. She was one of those of whom one says two babies were born, and the voice was sent to the wrong one ; for

she never looked as though she ought to have had a voice, or to be on the stage, or anywhere except in a palace, perhaps, with everything grand about her, and everybody waiting upon her.

‘ She did not seem to have a morsel of passion. The angels could not be sweeter, colder, fairer than that young girl. She could not act—she did not understand what acting meant, and nobody could teach her; but she could walk, and the way in which she crossed the stage always brought down the house. Then she curtseyed; night after night she swept her acknowledgments to the audience with a grace that produced thunders of applause. I close my eyes that have seen so much since those old days, and the blue eyes, the cloud of golden hair, the delicate complexion, the slight, lithe figure, the pure, saint-like expression, are present pleasures once more. Had I, Droigel, been asked to name the last woman I knew ever likely to have a history attached to her memory, I should have said—there, never mind who.

‘ She was making her fortune—and the fortunes of how many others might she not have made!—when a young gentleman, one of your great English families, fell—soh! over head and ears—in love. He was of a house and a race respectable to a marvel, honest, honourable. At her feet he laid all he had—his title—he was titled—his fortune, himself. In a word, would she marry him? In a word, she said, yes.

‘ That did not surprise me. His asking her did not surprise me. I suspected she had a hankering after the good things and great people of society. I fancied he seemed a big fish landed to her. I concluded her divine eyes, her seraphic expression, her charming locks had conquered him.

‘ “And you relinquish your profession without a sigh, Mademoiselle?” I said, after offering, in my clumsy way, the best wishes I knew how to express. “ You leave your admirers inconsolable; you depart for ever from a stage which may never behold your like again?”

‘ “Yes, Droigel; yes, yes, yes,” she answered, with a charming petulance. “ I am weary of my profession—so weary, I hope never to hear a note of music again. My admirers will console

themselves before another season has passed, and I shall depart from a stage I feel thankful to leave for ever."

"I was right, then," I remarked. "The voice angelic was sent by Heaven to another infant, but delivered by mistake to you."

"Whereat she laughed, and asked me to explain; and when I explained, she laughed still more.

"Dear Droigel," she made reply, "the same idea has occurred to me so often, so often, only I could never put it into words. You are right. Somewhere a youth or a maiden is living a wretched life because of the voice given in error to me. I ought never to have been a singer; it is not my rôle in the least."

"You think that of a grande madame will suit you better?" I suggested.

"I mean to try," she answered gaily. "Come and see, Droigel, how I support my character."

"Child," I said, "if you are really going to try this new life, better leave the old entirely behind you. Between Droigel and Lady—— there is a gulf fixed; but if Mademoiselle ever wants anything in which Droigel can serve her, she has but to hold up her finger and say, 'Come.'"

"Dear friend!" was all she answered; and then she held out both her soft white hands to me, and I would have kissed them; but she drew me towards her, and touched my cheek with her lips. I had known her when she was young, so young."

Herr Droigel paused. For once, I believe his emotion was sincere. Then he resumed—

Time went by—one, two, three, four years—and Lady ——, the once admired singer, had settled down into private life, and was almost forgotten. With great persuasion, her husband had prevailed upon his family to receive her. She had been, like most geniuses, lowly born, and the fact of her having risen to notoriety by her marvellous voice, did not help to mend her position in a house the members of which were pious as they were proud. Consider that conjunction, Annie—pious and proud. To me it seems awful.

'All this while scandal passed her by—gossip left her name

out of its records. Then, one fine morning came my lady to me.

“Droigel,” said she, “I am weary of my life. I long for the old existence, for the clapping, the excitement, the audience, the orchestra, the bouquets. I must sing once more, once if it be only once, and you must manage it for me.”

“And my lord?” I ventured to remind her.

“Droigel,” she asked, “are you going to stand my friend, or are you not?”

“I hope I am, madame,” I answered; and the good God knows I meant to be her true, true friend, though it all turned out so miserably.

I went to my lord; I told him her desire. In his set face, as he listened, I read the story of their married life, and his ultimatum did not therefore astonish me.

“Lady —— might return to the stage if she pleased, on two conditions: one, that she resumed her maiden name; another, that she agreed never to seek again to behold her children.”

I tried to move him, but in vain. She could take her choice—her art or her home. She had rendered his home miserable enough. For her he had made sacrifices, he said, such as none could imagine, and now she forgot all that; she wished to go and exhibit herself once more.

That was his idea of the nature of an artiste’s feelings. Well, but then none of us had ever thought she had the feelings of an artiste!

The children gained his point. She went back to her home and her duty. She loved the babies; oh, if ever there was maternal love, that woman had it. Let me hasten on. The opera season once more; big bills—Reappearance of Mademoiselle ——. The lessee has, &c. &c.

My dear, you might have knocked me down with a feather. I rushed hither, thither: every one was asking; no one could tell. I went to my lord’s town house; my lord was not in town. I ascertained by result of much trouble that my lord was not at any of his many mansions in the country; that he was not visiting the Dowager Lady his mother, or any of his other friends;

but that he was gone abroad. No one could say where, and no one could say either when he would return.

‘I tried to see Mademoiselle herself, in vain.’ I failed to procure even one glimpse except upon the stage. Yes—she reappeared. Once more the divine voice, once more the superb walk. Again the curtsey, the grace whereof had almost become historical. A second time she appeared, and I heard her then also. After which the papers stated she had been attacked by sudden illness, and would be unable to fulfil her engagement.

‘So time went by. I could learn nothing reliable about her, till one night I was sent for suddenly to the house of a good and wise physician, and—but no, I will not tell you the tragedy which had occurred. Her husband was written for, and returned too late. She was dead when he came, happily for herself.’

Whether Herr Droigel’s reticence was induced by a desire to spare my feelings, or a consciousness that if he divulged the whole circumstances of the case, it might have spoiled the effect of his argument, I can only conjecture.

Certain it is, had I known then, as I knew afterwards, that the poor lady was insane when she returned to the stage ; that her mania, previously unsuspected, declared itself positively after her second appearance ; that she subsequently fell into a state of profound melancholy, and was placed under the care of that good and wise physician Herr Droigel mentioned ; that the tragedy he referred to was the murder of her baby by the poor demented creature, I should stoutly have denied that at the door of either art or marriage so terrible a catastrophe could be laid ; but I am not so certain now that my contradiction would have been right.

The life she had to lead in her husband’s house was enough to kill any one who knew the meaning of the word ‘liberty.’ Cold though her nature was, small though her Bohemian propensities were, still the bars of her golden cage must have broken the heart that beat in vain against them.

But of the true incidents of the lady’s life I was then ignorant, and consequently Herr Droigel’s narrative and conversation left me with three questions wandering through my mind, none of which I could answer.

What was the nature of the tragedy that he so darkly indicated? Why had he, usually so reticent on such matters, introduced the subject of matrimony, and persisted in discussing the imprudence of art committing bigamy, to make use of his own idea? And third, who in the world could he imagine I should want to marry, or would wish to marry me?

CHAPTER XXV.

HERR DROIGEL IS GRIEVED.

THE fact of Herr Droigel honouring me with his confidence was not the only surprise I experienced on my journey back to London.

‘You love the country, Annie,’ he suggested. ‘The leaves and the flowers of summer, and the bare branches and dry twigs of winter.’

‘Yes,’ I answered, finding he paused for a reply; ‘I love the country at all times and in all seasons.’

‘You would like to live there continually.’

‘That would depend,’ I said.

‘Upon what? You speak like an enigma.’

‘And you ask such singular questions,’ I retorted. ‘Of course I love the country, but I should not like to go back and live there always, unless I had first done something—made a success, or proved a failure,’ I added, wondering at my own boldness in pronouncing the last word.

‘Less elegantly, but more epigrammatically,—“made a spoon or spoiled a horn,”’ said my companion. ‘I understand what you mean. We have been playing at cross-purposes. When I spoke of “country,” I had not in my thoughts a place similar to Alford, or even the beloved Lovedale, but a cot with its back door opening into London, and its front door affording access to green fields, to

lanes so beautiful, to walks tranquil as a dream. How would such a habitation suit the tastes of romantic Annie ?'

Romantic Annie, believing that the question was entirely a supposititious one, relating to some vaguely-intended change of residence at a future and indefinite period, replied that it would suit her tastes well.

'Then it is yours !' said Herr Droigel, clasping my hand between both of his, and turning up his eyes in an ecstasy. 'We are flying there now ! The country-bred bird will with delight enter into possession of her nest embosomed in ivy.

'What do you mean ?' I asked. 'Have you taken a new house ?'

'Behold the divine common sense of the English nation exhibited even in the tender person of this unsophisticated child !' exclaimed Herr Droigel, addressing vacancy. 'I talk poetry to her ; I would have discoursed of honeysuckle, bowers, and nightingales ; but she seizes my imagination, and with relentless grasp brings me back to the level ground of fact.'

'There are no honeysuckles, leafy bowers, or nightingales now,' I remarked.

'There will be, and I can see and hear and smell them,' he replied. 'I stand in the porch, and the scent of flowers floats to me in the calm evening air ; I open my windows, and the roses put in their pretty fresh faces ; I sit up at night to compose my poor songs, I lay down my pen, and there arises a burst of melody.'

'Then you have taken a new house,' I interrupted.

'Thou hast spoken, little maiden,' he answered.

'Where is it ?' I asked.

'Where is it ? Let me think. As you stand under the dome of St Paul's it is north. How far north ? You wish to know. Not far. Young feet with no care clogging their steps might walk to Westminster and feel little weariness. It is the typical cottage of happy England. It stands a little back from the road—the road, by the way, is a lane—sheltered from vulgar gaze by high hedges of yew, thorn, and privet. Fairy thorns, weeping willows, drooping ash-trees, stately evergreen oaks stud the tidy lawn ; the

porch is a mass of honeysuckles, roses, and ivy—the three strive together for mastery ; the rooms are small, the rooms are low ; but they open one into another, and so out on to a garden, where southern breezes woo the modest violets to bloom, and the tender primroses to start into beauty. Does the description please you, Annie, my child ? Say, is it the modest ideal crystallized ?

I had not crystallized in my own mind the question I wanted to ask concerning this sudden change of residence, and so remained silent, revolving the problem unexpectedly presented, till Herr Droigel inquired—

‘Of what is the child thinking thus earnestly, with bent brow and downcast eye, and lips compressed ?’

‘I was wondering,’ I answered, ‘whether you would be frank with me ?’

‘Frank with you !’ he exclaimed. ‘Am I not always frank to a fault ? open as the day ? Ask, and I reply, dear Annie. What hast thou in thy mind to say ?’

‘I want to know why you have moved from London, and so suddenly.’

‘Explicit,’ he observed ; then proceeded : ‘Were I not frank, did I ever keep anything hidden behind the door of my thoughts, I should now give you a dozen reasons for the change, any one of which might be true, and yet keep back the truest of all. You see what a weapon it puts in your hands dealing with a man who has nothing in reserve, who, in matters of the world, is guileless as a baby. And you too, Annie, you are guileless ; but you are wise and prudent, and reasonable for your years. Listen to me. The time comes, say in another twelve months, when we must try, you and I, our little venture. We must take that first step which costs, and whenever or however it is taken, I want no one to have a foregone conclusion as to how it is likely to turn out. I have enemies. Who has not ? There are those who could tear the flesh from off my bones, because I have composed a few songs that have become popular. Some, strange as it sounds, are even jealous of my small musical knowledge. They say “ Bah ! ” when Droigel is praised. When an

audience is so good as to clap—as is the barbarian practice in England—and shout “Encore !” they hiss, they cry “Hush !” they shrug their shoulders. Now, if one of these heard I had a pupil with a promise, they would at once begin disparaging. They would exclaim, “Pooh, pooh ! we know Droigel’s dreams of old. He has no sense, no understanding, he recognizes not a voice when he hears it ; he believes in voices which are not. This girl will make a fiasco.” And the British critic—who himself comprehends nothing of music, and who forms the opinions of the British public, who comprehend less—will listen and be persuaded. He will write : “The young lady’s upper notes are ready ; or her lower, rough ; or her middle, weak.” Or he will say : “She lacks expression, or her time is defective, or her ear false.”

‘What a prospect !’ I remarked.

‘It is nothing,’ said Herr Droigel ; ‘the poor man has his bread to earn, and we have ours. It is my business to get the start of enemies and idiots. It is for me to make at one stroke a *coup* which shall settle your position in the judgments of those whose judgments are worth having. Besides, we shall want all the health and strength, all the energy and courage and faith the pure country air knows so well how to give. A home by the murmuring sea might have been preferable, but I could not compass that, alas ! No.’

‘Then,’ said I, ‘you desire to take me a Sabbath-day’s journey into the wilderness, solely that I may be beyond the reach of your enemies.’

‘Consequently yours ; though they may not as yet be aware there is in existence a creature in every respect so admirable as our Annie.’

‘And not to render it impossible I should ever see any of my friends ?’ I went on, ignoring the compliment contained in his reply. Compliments from Herr Droigel were to me fast becoming almost as valueless as pearls to swine.

‘Who are your friends ?’ he asked, without a trace of surprise. ‘Your good uncle, the adorable Packmans——’

‘Say also, for the sake of argument, Miss Cleeves,’ I inter-

rupted, foreseeing and dreading the adjectives which would be prefixed to the names of Madame, Gretchen, and himself.

‘What!’ he exclaimed innocently; ‘that Miss so piquante, so clever, so bewitching, who ate and drank with a naturalness and perseverance most commendable; Miss who condescended to let me walk by her side to the house of her uncle; Miss who did talk, talk, talk; who has but one fault, that she is too clever; Miss, so affectionate, so eccentric! That Miss would not be your friend at this supreme crisis, Annie, but your enemy.’

‘And why?’ I asked.

‘She loves you, but she has no sense in her love. She would speak of that as a certainty which is as yet but a hope. She would run hither, thither, saying to this one and to that, “You must take tickets in order to hear my friend; she sings like an angel; I have known her since she was a baby: she has the most wonderful voice in the world; she has been instructed by that funny fat old Droigel;” and so forth, and so forth, and so forth. And then her friends might be disappointed and say, “Pooh, the girl is a nothing; I wish I had my money back that I was so foolish as to pay for hearing a ballad I could have sung better myself.”’

I have before said it would be vain to attempt a reproduction in writing of Herr Droigel’s English, and it seems almost as hopeless to describe by any word-description the manner in which he gesticulated whilst delivering himself of the foregoing sentence. He pulled his face into all sorts of contortions, he shrugged his huge shoulders, he mimicked Miss Cleeves’ voice and manner, he kept his hands moving about as though on the key-board of a piano to indicate the way in which she would run hither and thither. He was irresistibly funny, and for the life of me I could not help laughing even while I answered—

‘But that is precisely what Miss Cleeves will do, whether you keep me in solitary confinement or not.’

In a moment Herr Droigel was quiet, over his features there came an expression of touching melancholy.

‘You should not have said that, child, dear to me as one of

mine own ; you should not hurt wantonly one who has been a friend to you—faithful, true.'

'I am sure you have,' I hastened to reply, 'and I did not mean to hurt you. I did not mean the expression literally, of course. Pray forgive me, I am sorry to have vexed you.'

And I was sorry, for the man had been kind and good to me ; I was young too in those days, and young people do not, as a rule, like hurting the feelings of their elders. The tears stood in my eyes for very shame at thought of my petulance, and I stretched out both hands in token of repentance. Sadly and solemnly Herr Droigel accepted them and my submission.

'You are a good child, Annie, and very dear to me ; but you are weak, and I have my fears for your future. You never did, you never do, walk straight on firm and fast by reason of being quite sure where you mean to go. You hear one say that the road is full of dangers, you must not attempt to travel it, and so you halt and linger there ; then you go a little farther, and another exclaims, "You are not pursuing the right path !" so you, like Christian in the divine allegory of your Bunyan, turn aside into field-paths through which you flounder into Doubting Castle and the hands of that special enemy of all of a hesitating temperament, the great Giant Despair. Then one comes to you and takes you by the hands, and talks to you softly, and offers to put you in a way of reaching the goal, and is quite determined to have care of you by the road. He is able to fulfil the promise made audible to the dear sensible uncle, and silently and sacredly to his own soul. In his own rough manner he tries to make the adopted child happy, good, successful. He pets, he scolds, he teaches, he entreats, he storms, till the voice which was once only sweet, becomes a marvel of flexibility and power ; till success, if she will only take heed, is a certainty, not a possibility ; and then behold what happens ! The pupil so promising meets a Miss whom she knew for a day or two years ago, who never did her anything but mischief, whose proud relations drove the beloved grandmother to seek in her declining years a strange home in a strange place, and in a moment she begins to doubt again, she wants to go off hand in hand with

the clever demoiselle ; she would ruin her chances, she would go here, there, everywhere, she would sing to any one, she whose notes are precious ; and because Droigel puts down his foot and says no, the poor silly little *mädchen* huffs, pouts, frets, and is very much inclined to quarrel with one of the few real friends she has in this wide, cold world.'

'It is not so, Herr Droigel,' I answered, when at length the wordy torrent moderated. 'I confess I have been out of temper, but not for the reason you state. I know you have taught me all I am able to do. I know you have spared no pains to make me a singer ; I dare say you understand what is good for me much better than I do myself, and I am quite ready to do anything you tell me if you only explain why you desire it ; if—if only you will not treat me like a child.'

'And, mein Gott,' ejaculated Herr Droigel, turning up his eyes and invoking some deity included in his own theology, and of which certainly no recognized creed had knowledge, 'what are you but a child ? Suppose for the sake of talking babble, I say when we arrive in London, "Good-bye, sweet one ; we part here, big Droigel and little Annie ;" what would you do ?'

'I cannot tell,' I replied ; 'but that is nothing to the point, for most women would not know what to do if left suddenly alone in a great town where they have only lived in one house, the door of which is shut upon them. I am not a child, and it makes me cross to be treated like one. There, Herr Professor, you have had your say, and I have had mine.'

'Oh, these women,' he murmured, softly, 'these children !'

'These men !' I added, laughing.

'You are a naughty girl,' he remarked ; 'but Droigel cannot be unforgiving to his youngest, to the Benjamin of his age. You are a child no longer, you say, and—well, to please you we will cede the point. What does Annie the woman want ?'

'She wants you to treat her as you would a woman,' I began —here Herr Droigel cast a look upon me which was at once a mixture of amusement and compassion—'not to humour and deceive her as you might a baby.'

'Go on, I listen to you,' he said ; 'condescend to explain.'

‘For instance,’ I proceeded, ‘had you told me your views concerning Miss Cleeves, I should have written to let her know exactly how matters stood.’

‘Go on,’ he repeated; ‘I listen, I admire. Oh, the tact so divine of this English people !’

‘There was no need to make a mystery about it,’ I continued, boldly; ‘there was no necessity to go abroad.’

‘How grateful is this English people !’ he interrupted; ‘they deserve to be—rich.’

‘I hope I am not ungrateful,’ I said; ‘I have had a delightful trip—I never enjoyed anything so much in all my life as I did our journey; but still, had you said one word to me, only one, that evening Miss Cleeves spent with us——’

‘Enough,’ he said, as I paused, really not knowing how to proceed—‘enough ! I think I comprehend the intricacies of your heart now. To spare you trouble, to keep the bloom on the peach, the dew on the rose, the green leaves over the sweet violet, I have held you in ignorance of some few whys and wherefores. You want all that swept away; you would have the veil of mist which intervenes between youth and reality dispelled; you want to look out through plate-glass on a world which has some ugly corners; you want nothing softened, nothing concealed; you want me, to use your imperfect English expression—*gauche*, as all English expressions must of necessity prove —“to be frank with you.”’

‘If you can,’ I answered, eagerly. I did not mean to be rude, but the sentence slipped out unawares.

Herr Droigel seized hold of it, however.

‘It is for this we rear children,’ he said, addressing that imaginary audience he always seemed able to conjure up before his mind at a moment’s notice. ‘It is for this we wake when others sleep; for this we rise early, and take rest late; for this we eat the bread of carefulness.’

‘For what?’ I inquired, though I knew without his telling me.

‘For ingratitude which is keener than a serpent’s tooth,’ he answered.

‘I am not ungrateful, I hope,’ I said for the second time. ‘I know all you have done for me. I have always been, and I hope always shall be, ready to acknowledge that I owe every atom of learning I possess to you; that you and Madame and Gretchen have been good and kind to me; that I have been happy ever since I came to London; but you have not been frank with me.’

‘Not been frank with you! Well, it is of no use reasoning with one of your divine sex—no, not from the time she is in long clothes. Have your own way, my dear, and your own opinion. You will have both, whether I say yea or whether I say nay. You want to see not merely my actions, but to scrutinize my reasons for them. You want to peep here and there, like every other woman, if there is a closed door, and you are told there is nothing on the other side of it. You want, in a word, to see nothing. There is nothing hidden in me, child of my heart, whose petulance I forgive. You might look down, down into Droigel as through the waters of a clear lake; nothing lies at the bottom of his nature except a desire to spare pain, trouble, and anxiety to those who are more to him than himself. He has no Bluebeard chamber; but though there is nothing in the whole of his house worth seeing, you shall be made free of it. I say to you from this hour, Annie, take the keys and see whether there be any disguise, any secrecy, any of your English reserve, at once so repelling and so suspicious, about the foolish old dotard, who, cruel and unjust as she is to him, loves the orphan he found weeping under the shadow of a gray tower in a graveyard so quiet, so still, so beautiful, so sad.’

When he mentioned those keys which were to unlock the chambers of his heart, Herr Droigel took my hand in his and made a feint of putting the magic present into it.

What could one do with such a man, except look amiable again after having looked sulky? If you tell a friend he has a smut on his face, and the friend persists the black exists only in your imagination, has been created solely by your deficiency of vision, of what avail is remonstrance or iteration? He will not

believe, and there is not the slightest use in trying to make him believe.

I had drawn a shade across his transparency—that was the way in which he subsequently alluded to our conversation—but the darkness came from my nature, which though most ‘lofeable,’ was still English and eccentric. Droigel’s mind was ‘incapable of casting a shadow.’

‘Is it not so, mine Annie?’ he said, when, I having, as usual, given way on every particular, we made up our little disagreement and were friends again. ‘Did you not view the faithful adopted father through the medium of a cloud of British spleen? Have I ever had any secret from you which it behoved you to know? Am I not clear as the day?’

‘That goes without saying,’ I answered, weary of the controversy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OUR INVITATION.

THE change to the suburbs was in many respects pleasant; and though we went to our new abode at a season when the worst part of the year for town or country is coming on, still to me the face of the country seemed that of an old friend.

After all, the hollies and the laurels, the evergreen oaks and the yew-trees, were better objects on which to rest one’s eyes than the backs and fronts of other houses. It was agreeable, also, to sit in the pleasant pretty drawing-room, with the French windows open, singing to one’s heart’s content with never a soul to hear, and the rain pattering on the verandah by way of accompaniment to the piano. The kitchens were well away from the living rooms; and in them Madame always—and Herr Droigel when at home—spent much time. More ineffably nasty dishes, more indescribably curious *plats*, were, I think, concocted in

Woodbine Cottage—so our new abode was called—than had been the case in the heart of London. We boasted a garden well stocked with herbs and such vegetables as furnish variety in autumn and early and mid winter, and amongst these the Professor browsed like an ox turned out into fresh pastures. Never before probably had he revelled amid such a profusion of good things as were contained in that kitchen garden. Good heavens, in what startling combinations he rejoiced ! Sweet he made bitter ; bitter he made sweet. He stewed cabbage, he served up broccoli with sauces, the very aroma of which was an offence to my nostrils. Savoury herbs pervaded every morsel we put into our lips. He divided his leisure between the kitchen and the garden, between the range and the green-house. He exhausted his knowledge of English in adjuring a new maid-of-all-work and delivering lectures to the gardener—whom I once overheard muttering that ‘the old cuss always kep’ a-messing and a-talking and a-poking his inquisitive nose into places that warn’t no bissness of hisn.’

If it had ever entered into the mind of this gardener that a suitable selection of vegetables might be made from our stock and devoted to his own use or that of a friendly greengrocer between whom and himself pecuniary arrangements stood on a proper footing, he must have been a miserably disappointed man ; for I think not the value of a sprig of parsley escaped the Professor’s watchful eye. Keen as was his ear for music, I think his sense of possession was keener still.

We ate vegetables ‘like cows,’ I understood was the gardener’s unflattering comment passed upon the whole of us ; ‘and as for salads, large and small, they might be rabbits themselves, they might.’

Had Herr Droigel been an Englishman he must have succumbed to that gardener. As it was, the gardener struck his colours at the end of a month. He couldn’t stand it, and he wouldn’t ; and he didn’t, for he went ; and as we did not entreat his return, revenged himself by writing to his master, the owner of our furnished house, that ‘Mr Droggle’ was ruining the place ; that he had already stripped the garden clean ; that he was turn-

ing the conservatory into a stove, and that every plant would be roasted up alive ; that we kept no servant, and that everything was ‘going to wrack and ruin ;’ that we lived like pigs in a sty, and lived on made messes, slops, and roots—all of which mass of information was sent with the ‘duty of your humble servant, Robert Hayles.’

Certainly Mr Hayles never would have written such a succinct account of our shortcomings had he considered for a moment that it might bring his employer back from Devonshire, where he was wintering for the sake of a delicate wife.

His idea evidently was that Mr Merrich would at once insist on his tenant resigning the reins of government to Robert Hayles, and so avert that acme of wreck and ruin so tersely indicated as coming upon his possessions.

Innocent of evil—for indeed we had but utilized for ourselves those vegetables which Robert Hayles considered ought to have been sold for the public good—we were, totally unaware of the threatened thunderbolt, one morning pursuing our accustomed avocations when Mr Merrich arrived.

Madame was in the kitchen doing nothing, as usual ; our maid—a snuffy and rheumatic woman of threescore and ten—was in a very demi-toilette washing up the cups and saucers ; Herr Droigel had gone to town ; Gretchen was preparing for a purchasing expedition ; I was trying a little air I turned up in an old music-book, exquisitely simple, and for that reason perhaps all the more difficult to learn to sing properly—

‘Komme, lieber Mai, und mache
Die Bäume wieder grün,

I was beginning over again when Gretchen, looking handsomer than ever, and attired for walking, entered the room.

‘What an idiotic air that is you are hammering away at, Annie !’ she observed, with the freedom of criticism which lends such a charm to family intercourse. ‘I am quite weary of hearing you.’

‘You won’t hear me when you are out of the house,’ I answered.

‘No ; and I hope you will have done with it by the time I return,’ she retorted. ‘Anything you want me to get for you ? Adieu, then ; *au revoir !*’ and she left me to proceed with my studies.

Once more I began—

‘Komme, lieber Mai, und mache
Die Bäume wieder grün,
Und lass an dem Bache
Die kleinen Vielchen blühn,
Wie noch ich doch so gerne
Ein Vielchen—’

At this juncture the door opened for the second time, and Gretchen appeared, ushering in a gentleman, who bowed as I rose from the music-stool and glanced from him to Gretchen with a vague alarm.

‘Miss Trenet—Mr Merrich,’ said Gretchen, and I knew he was there on no pleasant business ; but even while I guessed this vaguely, I understood that Gretchen’s beauty, and Gretchen’s appearance, and Gretchen’s ready wit had averted the evil.

‘Do you know when papa will be home, Annie ?’ she went on ; and then when I said I did not, without giving Mr Merrich time to make any observation, she left the apartment, remarking—

‘If you kindly sit down for a moment, I will tell mamma you are here.’

Left alone with our visitor I essayed conversation. I tried the weather ; I made observations on the neighbouring scenery ; I even ventured to hope that Mrs Merrich had derived benefit from the change to Devonshire. Fresh also from continental travel, I found something to say in disparagement of the English climate.

On all these varied topics Mr Merrich made civil though not encouraging comments ; and I was racking my brains to find something more to say to him when he suddenly took the initiative.

‘You are a relation of Herr Droigel, I presume ?’ he began.

‘Courage,’ thought I. ‘It is easier to answer questions than to originate conversation.’

‘No,’ I answered, aloud. ‘I am only a pupil.’

‘But you reside with the family, I presume?’

‘I have lived with Herr and Madame Droigel for several years.’

‘You must not think me impertinent for making such inquiries,’ he continued; ‘but the fact is, I received a letter about my tenant which induced me to come up from Devonshire and see Herr Droigel. Of course I have only to look at this room’ (Gretchen and I, proud of the pretty furniture, had decked it out with flowers and greenery) ‘to feel sure the whole of the statements which have been made are untrue; but still——’

‘I cannot imagine any statement made about Herr Droigel to his discredit,’ I replied bravely enough, though my heart began to beat fast, for somehow the idea of libel, whether true or false, affects one like a sudden blow. ‘I knew him first at the house of a valued friend, and he has been very kind to me; and I did not imagine until this moment that there was any one in the world who would speak ill of him.’

‘There was not very much ill spoken,’ answered Mr Merrich, with a smile. ‘My correspondent only said the house was not properly cared for, and that the garden was in shocking order. You see I am quite frank about the matter.’

‘I do not think the house is in shocking order,’ I remarked. It would have been a shame if it had been, considering the pains Gretchen and I were at to keep it neat.

‘Neither do I, Miss Trenet,’ he said with a smile, glancing round at the tables, vases, mirrors, and chairs his own money had bought.

‘And as for the garden,’ I went on, ‘we were only three days without a man to attend to it. The person you employed left suddenly, and we were unable immediately to supply his place, but Herr Droigel saw to the conservatory himself; he is very fond of flowers; and there was nothing spoiled. Perhaps you would like to walk round and see?’

He hesitated for a moment, but then said straightforwardly—

‘I am rather proud of my little place, and should not have

it to every one ; so perhaps you will excuse me if I confess——'

‘Were Herr Droigel at home,’ I interrupted, ‘he would insist, I know, upon your inspecting every nook and corner ;’ and wrapping a shawl round my shoulders, I stepped out upon the lawn, Mr Merrich following.

We paced slowly round the walks ; we visited the stable-yard ; we loitered in the conservatory ; and we became such friends that before we re-entered the house I had seen the letter, and understood we were indebted to Robert Hayles for the honour of Mr Merrich’s visit.

I could not help laughing over the gardener’s statements, they were so true although they were so totally false ; the whole epistle was such an admirable caricature of our establishment and ways of life, whilst at the same time it contained such an accurate reflection of Hayles’ disappointment, that it was utterly impossible to read the epistle with gravity.

‘I am unable to imagine, Miss Trenet, how you can derive amusement from such a scandalous production,’ remarked Mr Merrich.

‘He does not say anything very bad about us,’ I replied. ‘Gretchen and I have been laughing ever since we came here at the contest between Herr Droigel and your man. His habit evidently was formerly to provide what he chose for the kitchen. Herr Droigel’s habit is to take what he likes ; and we have had vegetables in every way vegetables could be cooked, except plainly, during the course of the last few weeks. I shall not know a carrot or a turnip if I ever see it dressed *au natural* again. Here,’ I went on, ‘is the Professor’s stove. He has made himself a little forcing-house in this corner for raising salads ; but I do not think the place is going to “wrack and ruin” at present.’

‘Really, Miss Trenet, I am disgusted to think I ever had such a fellow in my employment, and I feel utterly ashamed to have for a moment given credence to his slanders.’

Presently Gretchen joined us. Softening down the more grievous accusations brought by Hayles against the Droigel

family, I told her he had represented we were fairly stripping the grounds ; and she afforded us considerable amusement by speculating how her father would direct arbor-vitæ sprigs to be served, or what sort of physical condition we should be in after a stew of laurel-leaves.

‘She had been desired by her mother,’ she said, ‘to request Mr Merrich to join us at luncheon.’ Gretchen had even then an eye to effect, and did not choose to call our midday repast dinner. ‘It would be a satisfaction,’ she remarked, ‘for him to have something out of his own garden before we finished the whole of its contents.’

With the air of a man who felt he had been placed in a very false position, and who was determined to speak a few words of a disagreeable nature to his late employé, Mr Merrich accepted the invitation, and we entered the dining-room, where Gretchen had with her own hands set out the table, and where we found Madame dressed in her best black-silk gown, a cap on her head, and her hair tidy.

‘What a task I have had !’ whispered Gretchen, and she made a *moue* expressive of the endurance of much mental anguish.

But it would not have mattered much what Madame had donned. Our landlord’s eyes were too intently occupied with Gretchen—who, fair and tall and graceful, looked the very incarnation of a future queen of song—for him to have leisure to scrutinize very intently the appearance or attire of any other person present.

‘I suppose,’ he began after a time, speaking in that stilted phraseology which so many people think proper to adopt when addressing a person who is a public character, or any embryo who is likely to become so—‘I suppose it was in your interest Herr Droigel sought this retirement !’

‘No,’ Gretchen answered, smiling ; ‘I think had he consulted either my interest or my wishes, he would have remained in town. I am not particularly fond of the country, or its counterfeit the suburbs.’

‘ Oh I beg your pardon. I understood—that is, I imagined Herr Droigel hinted something about quietness and repose being necessary for perfect health and voice.’

‘ My health is perfect, thank you,’ she said ; ‘ and I have no voice. It is Miss Trenet on whom all our hopes centre ; but Miss Trenet has at present a disagreeable trick of building up hopes one day, and destroying them the next.’

‘ How can you say so !’ exclaimed Madame, in thick gutturals ; then addressing Mr Merrich she went on, ‘ Our Annie has not much look of being one day a singer professional.’

‘ No,’ he answered, slowly, casting at the same time a curious glance at my unlikely person ; ‘ no. I never was more deceived in my life. I certainly concluded—I should have said decidedly——’

‘ And you would have said aright,’ I interrupted. ‘ Herr Droigel told me a story a little time since of a voice which was sent in mistake to the wrong person. Mine is a similar case. No owner has as yet come to claim my voice ; but I am quite certain it does not rightly belong to me.’

‘ There is papa !’ exclaimed Gretchen, rising and going out to meet him. She was not a second away, but I knew by her expression when she returned that already Herr Droigel was *au courant* with the whole state of affairs.

Gretchen and I had few reserves in those days.

‘ What a blessing I chanced to be going out when our worthy landlord appeared !’ she said to me afterwards ; ‘ and what a mercy papa was not at home and roaming about in that disgraceful old dressing-gown !’

In his town-going costume the father found favour in Mr Merrich’s eyes. He gave his guest a cordial greeting, and desired Gretchen to produce some wine, which had come direct from his own native town of Mayence. Herr Droigel was apt to adopt as his own all towns in which he had ever sojourned. Abroad he always spoke of London as that dear foster-mother, or the English god-mamma who had presented her unworthy child with silver spoons and mugs undeserved.

Whilst he and Mr Merrich sipped the Marcobrünner, which I do not believe either of them really liked, Gretchen took up the parable of Hayles' enormities.

Herr Droigel listened thoughtfully, and Mr Merrich looked at me with the entreating eyes of one who should say—

‘Pray never tell them the exact contents of that letter.’

Perhaps his conscience whispered he ought not to have expected much mercy from me ; but I had been for so long a time accustomed to walk overshadowed by Gretchen that I forgave his evident disappointment at my appearance, and answered him with a reassuring glance.

‘Ha !’ commented Herr Droigel, when Gretchen had finished her narrative, interrupted by idiotic comments from Madame—‘ha, I will be one with the sorry rogue some day.’

He was holding his glass between himself and the light, and looking at the wine it contained with one eye shut as he delivered himself of this statement, altogether presenting a ludicrous appearance ; and yet spite of the absurdity of his expression and the moderation of his speech, it occurred to me, and also I think to Mr Merrich, that he would be as good as his word.

Ere long he asked our landlord if he would join him in a cigar, and for some half an hour the pair paced up and down the lawn on which the drawing-room windows opened, whilst Gretchen busied herself with some coloured wool-work, which formed a pleasant contrast to her white fingers ; and Madame, weary of her tight-fitting dress and longing to be out of it, sat down in an easy-chair, and gave utterance at intervals to heart-breaking sighs.

As for me, I began to copy the little song to which I had taken such a fancy. It was contained in a great cumbersome volume, troublesome to lift and place properly on the piano, and I wished to have it in some more accessible form.

‘Are not you getting sick of music, Annie ?’ asked Miss Gretchen at length, smothering a yawn as she put her question.

‘Yes, of my own,’ I replied.

‘Why do you not ask your second parent when he intends

to give his adopted child a chance of making use of all she has acquired ?'

' I have asked him, and he says he does not know—that when the wave comes in we must go out upon it.'

' What an utterance ! ' exclaimed Gretchen, and she resumed her work in silence.

After a pause, she began again—

' Annie, do use another pen or else a pencil ; that scratching makes me feel so irritable. I should like to get up and pull your hair.'

' You were more amiable at luncheon,' I observed, making the exchange she requested.

' Oh, of course ; one had to be agreeable. One did not want to be turned out of the house and with ignominy ; but I declare, what with the shock of meeting that strange individual, and the anguish I endured in making my mother more presentable, and the trouble it was to induce Susan to bring in the dishes and take herself away, I feel quite worn out.'

' You look worn out, Gretchen,' I agreed ; ' your eyes are heavy and your cheeks pale.'

' Nonsense,' she interrupted, turning sharply round to catch a glimpse of herself in a mirror ; ' what a little story-teller you are, Annie ! '

' Nay, it was you who said you were worn out,' I remonstrated.

' But you said I looked worn out,' she retorted.

' I think the one statement was about as true as the other,' was my answer.

' Having settled that to your own satisfaction, what do you think of Mr Merrich ? '

' I do not think much of him either for good or for evil,' I answered. ' I think he is like most people—there is very little in him either to praise or blame. He appears to me—'

' Hush,' cried Gretchen, ' here they come ; ' and she bent her head over her many-coloured wools, and I went on with my copying, and Madame raised herself in her chair, grasping the

arms with both hands ; and the steps came nearer, nearer, crunching over the gravel.

It is hard to tell why some days stand out so much more clearly in one's memory than others—days marked by no special incident, distinguished apparently by no circumstance calculated to impress itself on the recollection—and yet the years gone by contain such for each and all of us. Dreaming by the fire-light, looking out over the sea, resting on the green hill-side, wandering through the woods, loitering as the rivulet winds its devious way, singing its low song to the bending ferns and grasses—some days, some hours, for no reason that we can discover, come forth from the recesses of the past and are present with us once again.

The day of Mr Merrich's visit was one of those marked in my life, and I never could tell why, since the man exercised no influence on my future.

Sometimes I have fancied that, as coming events cast their shadows before, so, when unconsciously our feet cross a fresh boundary and our circumstances enter a fresh epoch of experience, a subtle instinct stamps the seemingly unimportant moment on our minds. That, at any rate, is the only reason I can give why the little room, occupied as I have described, is still present to my mental vision—why the sound of heavy footsteps treading loose gravel under-foot comes back as though my ear were listening to it now.

The footsteps drew near, then stopped outside the first window, through which Mr Merrich entered, followed by Herr Droigel.

‘ He said good-bye with much regret,’ he was kind enough to assure us. ‘ He had spent a delightful afternoon ;’ this I thoroughly believed. ‘ He hoped he should have the pleasure at some not remote period of seeing us all in Devonshire ;’ and in conclusion, when the time came for taking leave especially of me, he held my hand [for a moment whilst wishing me every success in my profession.

I know now what was passing in his mind. He thought it just on the cards that one day—who could tell ?—even poor little I might do something, be a somebody.

The chance was remote ; but the way in which fortune deals out unexpected honours to unlikely people is remarkable, so it was worth while being civil—worth while, spite of the shrug of his shoulders and shake of his head, reflected in one of Mr Merrich's own mirrors, I caught sight of Herr Droigel executing for his guest's private information.

After this fashion the talk tended, I knew, as the Professor attended his guest to the outer gate—

‘She has a little voice, this Annie, so dear to us all ; and if she rest much and take care of her health, and acquires courage and makes friends—who knows ?—she may have a moderate success. Let us hope so.’

For me, the time when shrug or shake of my master's could seriously impress or depress me had gone by. I had lived too long behind the scenes for the trick and mannerisms of that actor to impress me painfully ; and so, with a mind uninfluenced by the dismal fiasco that shrug and shake were meant to shadow forth, I returned to my copying, while Gretchen went up-stairs to equip herself once more in walking-costume, and Madame hurried after to change her black-silk dress for a déshabille that proved the more distressing by dint of contrast with the fine feathers in which Gretchen had decked her.

As for Herr Droigel, when next he appeared it was in an old pair of trousers, the dressing-gown abhorrent to myself and Gretchen, a waistcoat unbuttoned, and in lieu of cravat an old red handkerchief twisted round his neck. On his head he wore a battered straw hat, which he ceremoniously removed on entering the drawing-room.

‘Annie, my child, I absolve you from lessons this afternoon. I go to make myself a sash——’

‘A what, Herr ?’ I inquired, looking in his face, which beamed with pleasure and excitement.

‘A glass—how do you call it ?—this——’

‘Oh, a window sash. What in the world do you want that for ?

‘I want to grow myself more salad—more green meats, more lettuce stuff, more everything.’

‘Then you are going to make a cucumber frame?’

‘Thou hast it, Annie beloved—a cucumber frame. You will marvel to see what I plant in it. There, I must hurry away. Be good and practise. Farewell, dear child.’ And kissing his hand he departed.

I had finished my copying by this time, and was not sorry to occupy the next hour in learning the song.

Simple and easy as was the air, I could not satisfy myself as to the manner of its performance.

Rarely had I been so taken with a melody. It was graceful, it was charming; further, it was all my own. I had never seen it before. Never heard it. Never heard of it.

Possibly had Herr Droigel set me the task I might not have cared to complete it. As the matter stood, I worked at that song. I sang it over and over and over. I tried it in one time and another. I changed the key. I experimented with this expression and with that; and when twilight came I knew it perfectly. I could sit in the dark and let the notes flash out—rising, falling, coming, going, whilst my hands touched the keys lightly, softly indicating an accompaniment rather than playing one.

That night at supper Herr Droigel said to me, ‘What was it I heard you singing all by yourself with no light in the room?’

‘She has been at it all day,’ explained Gretchen; ‘a horrid stupid thing. I am sick of the melody, if it have one.’

‘Will you be quiet, Miss?’ exclaimed her father, with more asperity than he usually evinced towards beautiful golden-haired Gretchen. ‘I addressed my question to Annie, not to you.’

‘I dare say——’ Gretchen was beginning, but I broke across her speech by saying—

‘It is a little song of Mozart’s.’

‘Nonsense! Absurd! You talk without understanding!’ cried the Professor.

‘I assure you it is by Mozart.’

‘Then I say no; or if yes, you have singed him wrong.’ When excited Herr Droigel’s English was peculiar.

'I sung it right,' I answered sturdily. 'I have been practising it all day, off and on.'

'Then come with me at once.' And he rose, and seizing a candle proceeded towards the door, I following.

'Papa, there is macaroni!' called out Gretchen.

'Droigel, Annie goes off leaving her unfinished supper,' expostulated Madame.

What Herr Droigel said in reply to both observations it is not for me to repeat *in extenso*. All I know is that an avalanche of German words were preceded by a very English 'damn,' which I understood to apply especially to his macaroni and my supper.

By the time the objurgation was finished, we had reached the drawing-room and the piano.

'Now [for your Mozart, Miss,' said Herr Droigel, putting down the candle with a bang.

I did not amuse him with my manuscript, over which I knew he would have pished and pshawed, but I opened the great volume and placed it before him at a distant table, whither I carried the candle.

'Shall I sing it, sir?' I inquired. 'I know it without the notes.'

He motioned me to begin, and I sang it through just as I had done to myself—just as I was able so seldom to sing to him—with my very soul making melody through my lips.

When I had done I looked towards Herr Droigel. Unmindful of macaroni, he was gazing at the text.

'Oh, thou false Mozart, to have served me such a trick!' he cried,—'Mozart, whom I worship; who stands third only amongst the musicians I adore! Thou faithless Mozart, to thy turns of expression, to thy marvellous melodies, to thy simple surprises I could have sworn, I should have said, so long as hearing remained with me. But here is something which being yours is not yours, which comes stealing to me through the darkness, saying, "Droigel, here is an air you are ignorant of, and that you should know." Annie, you sing that melody divinely. Come and let me embrace you, my child.'

Which it is right to say was entirely a *facon de parler* on

the part of my instructor. If ever I went near him after such a command, he merely took two of my fingers and squeezed them.

On the present occasion we went through this ceremony solemnly; then, after wiping his eyes, he said to me, 'I forgot to tell you a piece of news that will please you. We, you and I, are invited to a grand party.'

'To a grand party!' I repeated, in amazement. I had heard of such things, but had never been asked to one in my life.

'Yes, where my Annie will have the chance of meeting a select company if she likes to go.'

'Tell me all about it,' I entreated, my cheeks aglow, my head on fire.

'There is nothing more to tell. We are asked to Sir Brooks' for the twenty-sixth.'

'Sir Brooks what?' I asked.

'Sir Brooks himself,' he answered.

Later on in life, I discovered Herr Droigel, clever as he was, never could master the fact that in England the proper names of knights and baronets are not pronounced without a Christian name preceding them.

The 'Sir Brooks' we were invited to visit was, in our idiom, Sir Thomas Brooks, Baronet, of No. —, Park Lane.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MY DÉBUT.

THAT night Gretchen and I sat with our two heads bent over one book: Dod's 'Peerage, Baronetage, and Knightage of Great Britain and Ireland.' The 'titled classes' were a new study for us; but Herr Droigel, in his business capacity, had occasionally to post himself up as regarded 'who was who,' and always kept a volume by him sacred to the nobility, in addition to one containing records of the landed gentry.

For the time being Gretchen's and my 'who' resolved himself into Sir Thomas Brooks ; and from Dod we elicited the information that 'Sir Brooks,' the fourth baronet, had been born some fifty years previously ; that he married—' first, daughter of Michael Mowbray, Esq., of Hopedene, Northumberland (she died 1829) ; and second, Lady Muriel Marguerite, third daughter of the tenth Earl of Fortfergus. Residences : Park Lane, London ; Hopedene, Northumberland ; and the Retreat, Fairport. Heir presumptive : his brother, Henry Algernon, born at Richmond.' Gretchen read that last sentence ; I did not. I saw—with my mind's eye—only the town twenty miles from Lovedale, where the waves lapped in on the sands, and the bay lay calm and unruffled, reflecting back the moonlight.

Half-an-hour's walk from my uncle's house brought one to the Retreat. I had known the place all my life as belonging to a vague Sir Thomas, who visited at the Great House, and who was a great power in the county.

'Evidently,' said Gretchen, interrupting my reverie, 'the first wife brought the money, and his second wife is helping Sir Thomas Brooks, fourth baronet, to spend it.'

The amount of knowledge of the world possessed by some persons by no means gifted in other respects seems to me marvellous now, and it seemed naturally more marvellous to me then.

'Do you think I shall have to sing?' I inquired, all in a tremor.

'No,' Gretchen replied, coolly, 'I should not think so. I imagine you are asked solely for the pleasure of your society, and because your uncle keeps a chemist's shop at Fairport.'

'You talk nonsense,' I said sharply.

'And you talk like a baby,' she answered. 'If you are not wanted to sing, why in the world do you suppose these people should ask you at all? In fact, I am sure they never did ask you : they told somebody to bring a certain number of musical people, and that somebody has doubtless applied to papa for assistance. Sing?—of course you will have to sing ; and I for one am glad of it.'

And was I? Yes, on the whole I think so. Stronger even than my natural timidity was the desire to know what I could do, what others would say when they heard Herr Droigel's pupil ; heard the result of weeks, months, years of practice ; and yet the whole thing seemed to me unreal.

That the time was close at hand when I, Annie Trenet, should be led on to a platform, and curtsey to an applauding audience, and sing 'my little song,' and prove a success or a failure, appeared like a dream.

'Still, if I were ever to sing in public, I knew it was time I began. I had been on Herr Droigel's hands long enough. All he could teach me, all I was capable of learning, had been taught and learnt ; the days were now being spent uselessly. Even if I wished to put off the final plunge, I felt it would be neither politic nor just to do so.

It was only to take one step, and then—I would be brave and take that one step. So I decided before going to sleep.

But as time went on my courage sank below zero. Spite of all the efforts he made to conceal it, Herr Droigel could not completely hide the anxiety he felt.

He did not say anything to me on the subject nearest his heart, but I could not fail to see the importance he attached to the impression my first appearance might cause. He did not tell me to practise any particular song, he never bade me take care of catching cold, or warn me to play no tricks with my voice, as had been the case formerly, but I found his eyes often fixed upon me. He failed to find pleasure in his favourite dishes ; he talked little, and walked up and down the garden and through every room in the house a good deal, and he interested himself about my dress to an extent which would at any other time have caused Gretchen and myself to shriek with laughter.

As matters stood, we all, however, felt a serious crisis was at hand, and were disposed to treat even apparent trifles in a serious and becoming manner.

'Though I am not in the least degree doubtful of the result,' said Gretchen, 'it is impossible not to feel a little anxious about your débüt. It means riches or poverty for all of us.'

'Is there no medium,' I asked, 'no middle path between the two?'

'I think not,' she replied; 'it is not a question of power but of courage. You can sing, we know; it only remains to be seen whether you will do so before an audience.'

'Trust me, Gretchen,' I answered. 'I will try to be brave.'

As a rule, Herr Droigel, so long as our demands on his purse were not too frequent or too heavy, allowed us to dress as we pleased without hindrance or comment.

If sometimes Gretchen or I, in the vanity of our hearts, exhibited to him a new bonnet or mantle, or asked if he did not think the colour of a dress lovely; he was wont to say: 'Ah, my dears, youth is beautiful in anything. Everything is becoming to the young.' But now all seemed changed.

Over my attire for Sir Brooks' party he fidgeted himself and me to an extent which was simply incomprehensible.

He accompanied me to a modiste, with whom there had evidently been confidences exchanged previously.

'Is this the young lady?' she said, in broken English; and on being assured that I was, she stood back to survey me critically, as Worth might now.

'Mon Dieu, but you had reason,' she went on, after a pause. 'It shall be just as you made suggestion. The coiffure——'

'Shall be in keeping, rest assured,' finished Herr Droigel with a satisfied smile, and then he left me with Madame, who treated me as she might a lay figure she had been instructed to dress to the best advantage.

'What colour is it to be?' I asked innocently, thinking there could be no guilt in inquiring what I was to wear, but Madame flung up her hands and turned up her eyes at the question.

I must wait, I should see. If my good guardian had not spoken, were not her lips sealed? His taste was perfect, so was his judgment. I should be dressed *à ravir*.

So far as I was concerned, I did not see much to ravish my eyes when the dress did come home. It lay spread out on the bed when I ascended the stairs after tea, and a young lady sent by Madame the modiste mounted guard over it.

What had I not pictured to myself as the dress I should like to wear ! White looped up with roses, or flowers of the blue convolvulus, blue wreathed with clematis ; pink trimmed with soft lace. What a blessing it is young people are not always free agents, and consequently cannot bedizen themselves after the desire of their hearts !

And the dress I beheld ? you ask. It was black, of a filmy, gauzy material ; a poor thing, I thought, though it cost a great deal of money, and produced a considerable effect ; with a white tracery running through it, with a soft floating effect disappointing to me.

I should have liked a gown stiff as brocade, grand as velvet, and there—well, there it lay, and I had to make the best of it.

That morning a hairdresser had come to curl my hair, and I had, in obedience to Herr Droigel, been running about in the air all day to uncurl it.

He wanted it to fall in ‘ heavy lumps,’ he explained. Those were the days in which women had hair in plenty of their own, and mine was exceptionally thick and long—so long, that even in curls it fell almost to my waist, and we had to put it out of the way as best we could while the important question of robing proceeded.

As for the assistant, she was in ecstasies ; for me, I was disgusted. I looked in the glass and beheld a pale face and dark hair, a black dress against a white skin, and nothing to relieve or soften either.

Had I been going to a funeral, I could not have assumed a more sombre guise.

A coral necklace might have brightened up my appearance, but even that was denied me. A double row of jet beads was clasped round my throat, and thus ornamented the young person pronounced me ‘ perfect.’

‘ Let Monsieur see,’ she suggested ; and Monsieur having seen and been satisfied, I was hurried into a brougham duly hired for the occasion, and consequently called ours ; and we drove off amidst an almost unintelligible series of utterances from Madame Droigel, and smiles and kissing of hands from Gretchen, who

farther prospered our undertaking by throwing an old shoe after our vehicle as it emerged from the gate.

The die was cast, the step taken. During the drive, which seemed to me to occupy hours, Herr Droigel talked laboriously—I use the word advisedly—till, utterly worn out with the flow of unmeaning sentences and the unwonted movement of the carriage, I told him I could listen no longer—that I was getting such a headache I should not be able to sing a note.

‘Sing !’ he repeated; ‘who said anything about your singing?’

‘Ah, Herr Droigel,’ I replied, ‘we should never—that is, I should never—have been asked by Sir Brooks’ (Gretchen and I had fallen into this form of expression) ‘for the mere pleasure of my society.’

‘And what knowest thou, Annie, of Sir Brooks, or any other Sir, to warrant such an assertion?’

‘I know nothing of him,’ I replied, ‘but I do know something of his friends ; and they—the Wiffordes at all events—would as soon think of inviting their coachman to dinner as of asking me to spend an evening with them.’

‘Soh, soh ; then the Ladies Wifforde, your Great-House heiresses, are acquainted with our baronet ; what you call hand-and-glove?’

‘I cannot say anything about hand-and-glove, but they visit at the Retreat, Sir Thomas’s place near Fairport, and Sir Thomas—Sir Brooks—visits at the Great House.’

‘That is odd—that is what we may call one coincidence,’ remarked my companion. ‘But it is the lady who asks, not the husband. She has, oh such heavenly impulses ; she loves music and musicians, paintings and painters, books and authors.’

‘She must have a very large heart,’ I observed.

‘Don’t be satirical, Miss. Satire may be the correct thing at forty, but it is a mistake for a girl in her teens. No, as I was saying, the Lady Brooks is artistic herself, to the tips of her taper fingers. She gets up little operas, she has charming afternoons, she takes singers, such as Serlini for instance, to her bosom ; she can act herself in short charming pieces with a marvellous spirit. Poor Sir Brooks—well, he is Sir Brooks ; fat, heavy,

English, beefish, phlegmatic, good-natured, with an adorable rent-roll, a rent-roll calculated to make all the world perceive his good qualities ; but Lady Brooks is the light of the household. You shall see her, you shall judge for yourself,' he added, as our modest conveyance, following in the wake of a dashing carriage and pair which had just drawn off, stopped in front of a brilliantly-lighted house, which Herr Droigel informed me in an impressive whisper was the abode of Sir Brooks.

At that moment I think I lost my senses, and never perfectly recovered them again till I awoke, late the next day, in my own bed, in my own little room. I remember, as in a dream, the red carpet on which I stepped, the hall filled with brilliant flowers and servants no less gorgeous. I remember some one taking my cloak, and some one else, in a small back room, asking if I would have tea. Two or three people were there with whom Herr Droigel shook hands and chatted while he stirred his tea and sipped it, and swelled out his chest, and protruded an immense extent of shirt-frill, in which glistened a diamond brooch.

My master looked magnificent that evening. Any one might have taken him for the prince or grand-duke of some German state a few acres square—he was at once so dignified and so condescending—so affable, and yet so stately.

Looking at him, I felt inclined to rub my eyes and ask, could this be my Droigel or another? Could this be the person I habitually beheld clad in an old dressing-gown, with slippers down at heel, unshorn, unkempt, very frequently unwashed? Was this man—so grand in his presence, so kingly in his manner, so self-possessed, with such an air of society—the Droigel I had hitherto seen in the bosom of his family, concocting horrible *plats*, babbling with Madame, looking after the peccadilloes of successive servants, or shrieking out to me that one note was too flat or another too sharp, and the general effect of my singing enough to set 'his teeth on edge'?

As for me, no one took the smallest notice of my existence, except that, when we passed from the small room into a large apartment, at one end of which stood, in a sort of alcove, a grand piano, that bade fair to be rent to pieces by reason of the blows

a fashionable pianist was dealing it, a lady glided up to Herr Droigel, and, pressing his hand, said—

‘How good of you to come ! how can I thank you sufficiently ? And so you have brought your little girl. Quite right ; it will amuse her.’ And then, with a very fashionable smile, she passed on to give currency to some other conventional white lie.

It was Madame with the heavenly impulses. She was very fair ; I saw that, spite of the state of semi-idiotey to which I was reduced.

She spoke of me as a child ; as if I were ten years of age, and had been brought there for a treat. Was she mad, or was I ?

On most persons, I suppose, the first sight of a brilliant party produces an effect such as might be induced by a goblet of sparkling wine given to one who had never previously tasted anything stronger than water.

For myself, I can honestly say, I was mentally intoxicated. When I walked, I seemed treading on air ; when any one spoke and I answered, the voices sounded to me unreal ; when I looked at the brilliantly-lighted rooms, at the beautiful ladies, at the gentlemen leaning over to catch their words, I felt I must be either in dream or in fairy land.

No transformation-scene was ever less real to me than the scene which greeted my eyes that night ; the shifting colours, the changing faces, the scent of flowers and perfumes, the sound of music, the hum of voices.

Suddenly upon the assemblage there fell a hush ; the hum of voices subsided ; there was a pause, during which it seemed to me, still looking and feeling as in a dream, each guest held his or her breath. Up the centre of the room a path was cleared, and then, led by Sir Brooks—the tips of her fingers resting on his arm—a lady moved slowly towards our end of the apartment.

Like a queen she inclined her head to those who gave her greeting ; like a queen she walked ; like a queen she wore a mask between her heart and the crowd who looked upon her face. Ah, Heaven ! how more and more dream-like the scene grew when I beheld her—when I saw the sovereign to whom in the years gone by I had given my allegiance, Serlini—than whom

there never was but one, than whom there can never be another !

She sang. I was not three yards distant. I could have caught the train of her sweeping dress by stretching out a hand. She sang. Why should I try to describe that which is historical ? She stirred the hearts of the young by indicating the feelings to come ; by some curious sympathy her tones evoked olden memories in the aged, by touching strings no hands had strayed over for a quarter of a century ; at once she was all things to all men. She came simply and naturally, like the primroses of spring or the lilies of summer, and men and women rejoiced ; why, it might have puzzled them to explain, as it puzzles me now to record.

Why do those who have once heard the nightingale always remember that song with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain ? Wherefore do they recollect it to the end of life ?

Who shall say ? Who shall explain these things—why the trill of a bird, the tones of a voice, the rhythm of an air, linger in the memory—why, when the singer is dead and gone, that conjurer Time, who steals so much of our best and brightest from us, relents, and gives back, like an echo, note for note of the melody which charmed away our senses in the long ago ?

The song was sung, and she was gone—lost among the throng. Herr Droigel played the accompaniment for her. I notice that fact now without wonder, though I noticed it then with a certain surprise. Yet I need not. His touch was so sympathetic, his power of expression so perfect—was !—is, rather ! When next I go to town, shall I not probably hear Droigel accompany yet another prima donna, the favourite of the season ? Over Serlini, the favourite of all time, he and I bemoan ourselves.

Of that evening I have, as has been said, only a vague confused recollection ; nothing seems to stand out clear and distinct in my memory. I saw as through a mist ; I heard as in a fog. Faces mixed themselves up before me ; voices and utterances produced no clear impression on my mind. I am no equestrian ; good society and I formed acquaintance too late for me to acquire the thoughts, habits, or accomplishments of those who are to the manner born ; but I have always in my own imagination fancied

that a man, galloping across country as hard as his horse can take him, must feel as I felt that night at Sir Brooks' ; where object succeeded to object, and sound to sound, and face followed face, with the same rapidity as hedge and field, and copse and stream and fence, must pass before the eyes of a fearless rider.

I was not fearless. I was apparently brave and self-possessed, because I had almost lost the power of feeling anything. I looked, answered, listened, like one in a dream. I heard singing ; I heard long fantasias executed ; I saw musical gymnastics performed on a much-enduring piano, by long-haired foreigners with supple fingers and lean muscular wrists.

Young ladies sang, and so did old, for the matter of that. There were quartettes and trios and duets ; and then a man with a dark complexion and black hair, and a hooked nose, and very white teeth, and a wonderful display of jewelry, said to me, 'Now, Miss ;' which meant that my turn was come.

Then for a moment I seemed to awaken and shrink ; but the dark man led me to the piano, where Herr Droigel sat, and putting a roll of music into my hand, left me to my fate.

I heard murmurs of 'Who is she ?' 'What is she ?' to which a gentleman, with a glass stuck in his eye, answered, 'It is Droigel's baby. Hush !'

The prelude began, and my future was to make or to mar. I thought then, and have often thought since, that had the choice been given me, I should a thousand times rather have preferred singing that first song before a great audience ; an audience that would have clapped and encouraged me, and given me a sufficient fillip to enable the opening notes to be uttered with courage and distinctness.

As it was, my voice trembled, its tones were uncertain ; then Herr Droigel played a little louder, and flung upon me a look of anguish. Had he seemed angry I must have broken down altogether. As it was, I remembered all that depended upon my success ; how much happiness, how much misery—in a word, how much or how little money, and strung myself up to the execution of my task as a rider might to take some tremendous leap. There was no more timidity, no more unsteadiness ; I

never looked at my music or at the company ; I kept my eyes fastened on the wall at the extreme end of the apartment, and I sang. How I sang I knew by the storm of applause which followed, by the touch of Herr Droigel's great hand softly clapping my shoulder, by the tears of thankfulness I saw in his eyes.

'God bless you, Annie !' he whispered. 'Now you shall sing Mozart for them, and nothing more to-night—no, not another note.'

Wise was Droigel in all his ways ; he led me off while Sir Brooks' guests were still willing to hear me again. To Lady Muriel I heard him murmur, 'It is her first trial, and she is young and shy.' And then we were in the small room, almost empty now, and some one brought wine and wished me to take it ; but I put the glass aside and asked for water.

My lips were dry and my throat parched, and my cheeks burning ; but I was happy, oh, *how happy* I felt, no words could tell.

At that moment Madame Serlini came in, leaning on the arm of a gentleman whose face I should have recognized had I looked at him, instead of being absorbed in contemplating her.

She spoke to my master as she passed him, and then addressed me.

I stood up as she did so. I let my hand lie passively in hers while she said in her soft foreign accents—

'I hear you and I are old acquaintances—that we met ever so long ago at Fairport.'

'I have never forgotten you, Madame,' I managed to say.

'How strange ! and I have never forgotten the little girl whose face was so wonderful a study. You did not come to hear me again, though.'

'I had to go home,' I explained.

'Where my cousin and I once paid you a visit,' added Madame Serlini's companion.

'Oh, Mr Sylvester !' I cried out in my astonishment at meeting him ; and then he said Miss Cleeves had been talking about me quite lately, that he knew I was studying under Herr Droigel, and that he congratulated me upon my success.

There was a little stiffness and reserve about his manner which seemed only natural in the address of any one connected with the Great House, but it made me feel nervous and uncomfortable nevertheless.

‘Is Miss Cleeves——’ I was beginning to inquire, when I saw a swift change pass over Madame Serlini’s face ; and in the same instant I heard the gentleman who had spoken of me as a baby say to Herr Droigel—— . . .

‘So we know now the reason of your sudden affection for the country, and flight from town. You wanted to bring the violet to perfection, and a remarkably sweet flower it is, doing credit to your selection and your culture. You agree with me?’ he asked, addressing Madame Serlini. ‘It will be the young lady’s own fault if she fail to climb to a great height.’

‘Miss Trenet has a charming voice,’ she answered, in cold measured tones. ‘Herr Droigel, can I set you down anywhere? No; then will you have the kindness to take me to my carriage? Mr Sylvester Birwood, I give our young friend into your charge.’ And so, with a slight inclination, she would have passed the newcomer, but he stepped before her.

‘You will have some supper, will you not?’ he asked.

‘I never sup,’ she replied.

‘But Miss Trenet——’ . . .

‘Has sung her appetite away, or I am much mistaken,’ was the answer.

‘Lady Muriel commissioned me——’

‘I have already made my adieux,’ said Madame Serlini.

‘And our charming hostess, so sympathetic and full of comprehension, permits the absence of Droigel and his child-singer,’ added the Professor, in an access of unsophisticated artlessness.

With a sneer, a bow, and a shrug, the gentleman drew back disappointed.

‘Good night, Miss Trenet,’ he said ; ‘you have my heartfelt wishes for your success.’ And then I found myself walking beside Mr Birwood, whose surname I had just heard for the first time, with the tips of my fingers touching the sleeve of his coat, wondering all the while whether, if Miss Wifforde knew,

she would feel very angry at the idea of her nephew taking even so much charge of me as this implied.

I do not think she would have disapproved of the extent of our conversation.

‘Do you remember telling me you never intended making any use of your voice?’ he asked, as we crossed the hall.

‘Yes,’ I answered; ‘there was a time when I made up my mind never to sing before any one.’

‘But you changed your purpose?’

‘More correctly, perhaps, it was changed for me,’ I replied. ‘I had scarcely a choice in the matter.’

‘But still I presume you became Herr Droigel’s pupil of your own free will.’

‘My uncle would never have wished me to become a singer against my will.’

‘And you think you shall like the life?’

‘Oh, yes; I am sure I shall—greatly.’

‘You sing very, very beautifully,’ he remarked.

‘Thank you,’ I answered with gratitude.

‘Come, Annie,’ exclaimed Herr Droigel at this point in the conversation; ‘do not stand in the draught, child. I told our driver to wait at the corner of the street for us. There is Madame Serlini waving her fan to you;’ and he performed a series of frantic gesticulations after her carriage.

‘Good-bye,’ I said to Mr Sylvester. I did not know whether to offer him my hand or not; but he settled the question by taking it.

‘I shall tell my cousin of your success,’ he remarked; ‘she will be delighted to hear of our having met.’

‘Ah, that adorable Miss Cleeves!’ cried out Herr Droigel. Madame Serlini had evidently given him every information concerning Mr Sylvester. ‘Would you carry to her the profound homage of her humblest admirer?’ Mr Birwood, smiling, said he would; and so we parted. The night of trial was over; the first step taken; the plunge made; and on all sides I heard but one opinion.

I had made a success.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LIKE A MAN'S HAND.

SUCCESS never seems so real a fact as failure, wealth as poverty, pleasure as pain.

It is hard to say why this should be the case ; but the experience of most persons will, I apprehend, confirm the truth of my observation.

We climb by almost imperceptible steps to the attainment of our wishes ; but if we fall when nearly touching the summit of success, we have the long, long way we travelled upward to descend before we even commence our weary explorations of the abysses of despair.

There is nothing intangible about disappointment ; there is nothing dream-like to the man who, having striven, has yet gained no prize. But there is something indefinite in success.

Sweets do not linger on the palate like bitters ; joy lacks the realism of sorrow. Happy as I felt that night, I vaguely understood I was not one half so radiant over my success as I should have been despondent in the event of failure.

I grew weary of Herr Droigel's ecstasies ; the compliments he repeated clogged my ears. The night and the pure fresh air seemed more grateful than the brilliantly-lighted rooms, filled with rank and beauty, where a hundred perfumes mixed and floated through the air. Spite of my companion's remonstrances, I let down the window, and putting out my head, allowed the cool breeze to fan my temples. Lovedale and its sweet peace came back to my memory. I could hear the bees humming, and smell the beds of thyme ; I was wandering through the pine-woods, I was listening to the stream.

So perhaps to a great statesman, author, general, or preacher, there may come in the very moment of fulfilment the remembrance of some humble home, of beloved schoolfellows, of days, peaceful happy days, that can return no more ; of the dead, long

sleeping quietly, who once made earth blessed with their presence.

‘ You are overwrought, my Annie,’ said Herr Droigel at length, drawing me gently back and pulling up the window. ‘ You have eat not, you have drank not. Bah ! who ever eats or drinks at Sir Brooks’, where there is nothing to be had but iced water or water ices ? How splendid was the coolness of Serlini ! “ I never sup,” she said ; and she is right. It is to a banquet she sits down when she returns to her own house—a banquet where there is everything out of season, and flowers which blossom not save at a tropical heat.’

‘ Who was that gentleman to whom she was so barely civil ? ’ I inquired.

‘ He is the Honourable Florence,’ answered Herr Droigel, as usual dropping the intermediate Christian name as of no account ; ‘ a man about town ; a man who has been about town all his life. Proper people do not incline to his society. I know not myself that there is much harm in him. He married a rich old lady, who did not die soon enough for his pleasure ; but she is dead now, so we will let that scandal lie. He is a man wonderfully devoted to music and to everything beautiful ; a man dangerous to offend, but who sometimes proves a useful friend. Ah, here we are at the modest home once more. Hush, not a word ; I will make-believe you have effected a fiasco.’ And he preceded me through the open door which Gretchen held wide for our entrance.

‘ What is the matter ? ’ she asked, looking into her father’s face, over which he had composed an expression of profound dejection ; then, glancing past him at me, and seeing the smiles I could not conceal, she cried out, ‘ Oh, you darling ! all has gone well, then ! ’ and caught me in a close embrace.

Till that night I never exactly comprehended what my failure would have meant to the family of which I had become one.

I had known a great deal of their future ~~happi~~ness or anxiety hung on the issue ; but after all, happiness and anxiety are mere figures of speech until one beholds them ~~utterly~~ bared of conventional clothing.

Little as I understood of the world, I had seen enough to

feel sure from the rejoicing over my successful *début*, that failure and beggary would have been almost synonymous terms. Herr Droigel had staked a great deal on me, and won. It is not every day a speculation of this sort, or indeed of any sort, turns out well, and he was jubilant accordingly.

Long as I have known the Professor, intimate as my acquaintance had been and is with him, I have not to this hour an idea of the creed to which Herr Droigel subscribes ; of the nature of the religion he 'shrines in his soul ;' of the name or names of the god or gods his 'natural reason worships.'

All I can say is, the creed is as far from being apostolic as Athanasian ; the religion of a kind which must have been revealed to himself alone, and his fetish a creation entirely of his own imagination.

However, let the idol he had evolved out of his metaphysical researches, and deduced from long observation of nature and mankind, be what it would, he evidently entertained some feeling of religious gratitude for my success.

He did not seem to care to talk much about the 'good fortunes of this so dear Annie,' but left inquiry and comment to his wife and daughter.

' You must not babble to me,' he said in reply to a torrent of questions that poured from Gretchen. ' I want to feel thankful and eat my supper without being disturbed by words lighter than thistledown. And let that weary child have some peace. Is it not enough she has vindicated my judgment and made her mark, but you must ask her to tell you this and tell you that, when her poor head is still spinning round like a top ? '

' It is your dear old head that is spinning,' Gretchen retorted, patting the head so referred to with affectionate approval. ' You are thinking what lovely present you can make Annie ; you are considering, " I wonder whether my Gretchen's heart would be glad at the sight of a shot-silk dress, changeable as the colours on a dove's breast ; " you are full of benevolent projects——'

' I am full of projects,' he interrupted, ' which I must see carried out before I can be benevolent. We have made the first step well, but there is a long road to travel before we can touch

our goal. Annie's notes are good, but we must see about cashing them. Ah, this money, this money! Annie,' he broke off, 'you look white as a ghost. For the love of me, of Droigel, taste that wine, in a draught of which I drink to you, best and most docile of pupils. Too tired to eat? Then you had better get to bed and to sleep. No, Gretchen, stay here, and let her alone for this night; she wants rest; it has been too much for the country-bred maiden.'

He was right, it had been almost too much for me. When I got up-stairs my head seemed spinning as he had said; my limbs felt weary, my hands numb.

I sat down beside the dressing-table, feeling wearied and languid, but oh so thankful, so content. Like a dream, my past life lay stretched behind; like a vision of fairyland the future unrolled its possibilities to my imagination.

I could not rest till I had told Uncle Isaac of the success already achieved; and late though it was, I wrote him a long letter, which I was in the act of finishing, when through the silence there came a crash as if every pane of glass in the conservatory had been broken, a crash followed by a second and yet a third.

Before that came, however, I was on my way down-stairs.

'Something dreadful must have happened in the garden,' I exclaimed; 'I think the green-house has fallen.'

'I think not,' Herr Droigel answered deliberately. 'I believe it is only that my salad is now well mixed.'

Saying which he lighted a lantern and took a stick, and sallied out in the direction of the garden; Gretchen and I, spite of Madame's remonstrances, following at a respectful distance.

We could hear his measured footsteps crunching over the gravel, and we could hear besides something not measured—groans and curses combined in inextricable confusion.

'It is Hayles,' whispered Gretchen; 'take my word, he came to steal the vegetables, and has hurt himself.'

It certainly looked as if he had, when Mr Hayles came into the hall, escorted by Herr Droigel.

His hands and face were much cut, he was bleeding from a variety of wounds, he was trembling like an aspen.

'If you had only told me you were coming,' said the Professor, politely, 'I would have had things better prepared for you. Can I offer you warm water and strapping-plaster?'

'Are you going to send for the police?' asked Mr Hayles, with desperation.

'No, my friend, I am not going to send for the police. My time is of value--time to me is money, as says the proverb of your country. You are free to go. Next time you want any vegetables, it will afford me great pleasure to send them to you, if you will only let me know where they are to be delivered. Stay, you had better have *un petit verre*. Thank you, Annie,' he added, for at his words I ran and poured out some brandy and gave it to Herr Droigel, who in turn handed it to the sufferer. 'That will set you up. Be careful how you go out. Good-night.' And he held the lantern high, so as to light the short drive and the gate towards which his victim limped.

Arrived there, Mr Hayles, rendered courageous perhaps by the brandy he had swallowed, lifted up his voice and uttered a Commination Service against the members of our household.

His language was of that description Londoners are privileged to hear any day, at any hour, in almost any part of the metropolis. He held forth not without some needless repetitions in the vernacular of his class, and as he banged the gate, fired his parting shot into our camp.

'It was a d—d trick,' he shouted; 'and nobody but an infernal foreigner would have thought of baiting such a trap.'

It was impossible to admire either Mr Hayles' morals or his manner of expressing his feelings; but I could not altogether dissent from his opinions.

To invert an old adage, however, one man's poison is another's meat; and Herr Droigel thought he had done an exceedingly clever thing in circumventing his enemy.

When it came to a pitched battle between me and the Professor, he did not come off with colours flying so triumphantly. We signed a truce, which we shall never break now, I imagine,

unless the pious William and Prince Bismarck decide to invade England, in which case Droigel might bethink himself of a house containing a few articles worth looting—of a singer who, if compelled to reappear, might, by the magic of old associations and former prestige, be valuable to an agent once again. If he reads this sentence, we shall laugh together over it, and love each other none the less and none the more.

The day after my first success, he and I were friends 'to perfection.' Of all people in the world, who should drive out to our country retreat but Madame Serlini !

How good she was, how kind ! She came accompanied by a gentleman, who had, I subsequently learnt, much to do with the giving of concerts and the engaging of singers. He wanted me—me, Annie, to sing for him twelve times.

But already there was, to use an Irish expression, 'money bid for me.' With sighs and groans Herr Droigel lamented his fate. Goldstein, he of the Hebrew cast of features, and the jewelry which hung about his person like golden manacles, had spoken concerning me, and though his offer was 'low, much too low, still it was he who had arranged the invitation to Sir Brooks'; and besides, Droigel was under obligations to him; and no one could say, or should say, Droigel was ungrateful, or higgle-haggled like a huckster. No paper, it was true, had been signed; but then Droigel's word was as good as his bond.'

'There needs no writings with me,' he went on; 'what I say, I do. Man or woman I defy to bring against me that most terrible of charges, "he promises, and fulfils not."

'I wish every one could conscientiously make the same statement,' remarked Madame Serlini's companion, politely. Evidently he had called merely to oblige her. Even to me it was clear he did not believe to any extent in the talents of Herr Droigel's *rara avis*.

'It is bad, bad,' proceeded my master, 'for people to undertake that they have no intention of fulfilling. A man makes an appointment; in his positive English he says, "I will be at such and such a place at two sharp." I am there five minutes before the time, so as to be more than punctual. At half-an-hour past

two he is not there ; behold, thirty-five precious minutes lost out of my life—dead lost,' repeated the Professor, mournfully. 'Or one of the big music houses ; the chief thereof remarks to me, "Droigel, I will make up your account, and send your cheque for the half-year." He makes not up the account ; he sends no cheque, and I have to go twice, thrice, four times, before I can get even part of my money ; and all those weeks there wait for their accounts the British tradesmen whom my soul abhors, to whom I give no promises now, but that which their soul loves not, cash ; since across the counter is the antidote for cheating.'

During the time devoted by Herr Droigel to an enumeration of his virtues and a declamation against the vices of others, Madame Serlini had been carelessly turning over the leaves of a book which lay on the table, and looking occasionally first at him and then at Gretchen. Suddenly she said—

'Your daughter is older than Miss Trenet ; is it not so ?'

'Ach, but yes,' replied Herr Droigel, 'only a few months, however. Gretchen is—'

'Do not tell me, let me guess,' interrupted our visitor. 'Your daughter has lived twenty years.'

'And I also,' I stated.

'Perhaps,' she said, with a certain significance ; then added, 'Droigel, why did you dress your pupil last night to look like a "baby," as Mr Florence called her ?'

'Because I thought that goodly company might be lenient in proportion as they supposed her to be young,' answered Herr Droigel, glibly. 'Besides, Annie is years more juvenile than her age. We will put her voice aside—what is her appearance ?'

'That of a girl in her first teens,' said Madame. 'Perhaps you were right ; the younger probably you keep her for the present the better. If ever I can be of any service to you,' she added, rising and holding out her hand, 'command me. I shall follow your career with the keenest interest. Good-bye, Droigel ; if any one can make her triumphantly successful, you are the person.'

And so the interview ended, and our visitors were gone.

‘Mein Gott, but that woman is restless !’ exclaimed the Professor. ‘She reposes never ; she has the energy of ten thousand. Had I given you up to her friend, you would have been worked to death. You must have sung here to-day, and two hundred miles off to-morrow ; and you would have had to put the work of seven years into one, and appeared, ill or well, tired or not tired. Ah, Madame, you are good, clever, amiable, generous to a fault ; but you understand not the nature of such an English maiden as my Annie ! Her heart beats quietly, while yours, ach, Himmel ! throbs like a steam-engine at high pressure.’

With which definition of our different constitutions, Herr Droigel left me to study a new song he had composed, ‘addressed especially,’ so he stated, ‘to touch the feelings and open the purse-strings of the British mother.’

The words were simply idiotic, and the song as contemptible a composition as it was possible for the Professor, with his consummate knowledge of music, to produce ; but I can say from my own experience both answered the purpose he intended.

I never sang ‘The Mother’s Farewell’ in public without receiving a rapturous encore. ‘It brought down the parents, to quote Herr Droigel, who was wont to watch with a grim enjoyment the production of pocket-handkerchiefs by ladies, and the emotion evinced by heads of families generally. All this meant, I understood at a later period of my life, so many copies of the song purchased next day. I at first signed them by the five hundred, but eventually Herr Droigel had a stamp cut, and saved me that trouble.

All this happened in the early part of my career, while I was still innocent of the ways of the world, as Eve before she ate of the apple.

It was a happy life I led then. I had to work hard and sing so often that I sometimes wondered whether Madame Serlini’s energy could have exceeded that of Herr Droigel ; but I liked the applause I gained, and was more than willing to study closely in order to win it. Farther, every wish was gratified, every whim indulged, all save one.

For some reason it was so managed that I never saw any one alone, never was permitted to go anywhere alone. Had I been less busy I might have chafed more at this than was the case. As it happened, I did murmur occasionally at never being permitted to speak a word in private to Miss Cleeves, who came often to our house, sometimes accompanied by the Dagres, sometimes with Mr Sylvester, sometimes by herself.

When I remonstrated, however, with Herr Droigel, he said—

‘I have a sacred charge over you ; I am to you mother, father, uncle, guardian, friend—all in one. If harm came, how should I answer for it? Be tranquil, my child ; the day must arrive when you will thank Droigel for regarding each man and each woman as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The way of a young girl who sings in public, is not easy to keep strewn with roses. I would guard the heartache from you. Trust that what I am doing is best for all of us.’

‘Guess where I intend going next week,’ said Miss Cleeves one morning when I chanced to be alone in the drawing-room of our old house in London, to which we had again removed. ‘You could never guess, so I will tell you. To Lovedale, to the old darlings. How I wish you could go with me ; but of course, even if Herr Droigel permitted, the “ladies’” hair would stand straight up on end at the very idea.

‘I will read you what they say. Good Herr Professor, you are just in time to hear the wise utterances of my kindred concerning your pupil,’ she added, as my master, attired in dressing-gown and slippers, entered the apartment, apologizing for his déshabille. ‘Know all people, that this letter is from Laura, coheiress with her sister of the late Sylvester Wifforde Esquire ; and this is what she says : “As to your remark concerning our ever having ‘despised’ the young person to whom you refer, we are too much accustomed to your inaccurate modes of expression to attach any importance to the observation. We always considered Mrs Motfield and her granddaughter highly respectable and well conducted ; and while it must ever be a matter of regret to hear of any female devoting herself to a career so full of peril as that of a public singer, and though we bitterly lament

you can so far forego your own dignity as to associate with one in all respects, save that of modesty, your inferior, we are glad to hear she is able to earn a livelihood for herself; and we trust she may be preserved from temptation, and saved from bringing disgrace upon a family which, if humble, has always preserved its integrity." Now, how am I to spend a month with such antiquated dowagers?' inquired Miss Cleeves, folding up the letter, and never pausing to inquire how her unnecessary frankness might have affected my feelings. 'Nothing but the sternest sense of duty could induce me to revisit those scenes of my childhood.'

'Are you likely to be at Fairport?' asked Herr Droigel.

'Not at all,' answered Miss Cleeves, looking him straight in the face. 'If I should, however, happen to visit that charming seaport, can I convey any message from you to the dear uncle Isaac of our friend Annie?'

'I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing him in London soon,' Herr Droigel replied. 'Naturally he wishes to embrace his niece, from whom he has been parted so long.'

'This is news to you, I see, Annie,' observed Miss Cleeves.

And indeed it was. I felt so bewildered, I could make no answer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

Not all my questioning could elicit from Herr Droigel any information as to the period of my uncle's arrival; which was not singular, considering that when he expressed his hope of seeing him soon in London, he had not written or despatched the letter of invitation.

Ere long however an answer arrived. It was inconvenient for him to leave home, so the writer stated. At the same time

he could not resist the temptation held out. He would not, however, avail himself of Herr Droigel's proffered hospitality. Mrs Motfield had never visited London, and he would take the opportunity of showing her and a couple of his young people the sights. If Herr Droigel could look them out lodgings, he should take it as a favour.

At first Herr Droigel pooh-poohed this idea. Rather than that the uncle of his dear Annie, and the aunt and the beloved cousins, sought shelter in a strange house, he, Madame, and Gretchen should repose on the floor.

‘But, bah !’ he proceeded, ‘are there not rooms enough and to spare ? If Annie will occupy the same chamber with Gretchen, and a bedstead be erected in the back drawing-room, could not success be achieved ? Speak, best of wives !’

Thus adjured, Madame spoke.

All could be as he made suggestion. It would be bad for every one, if the house were deserted by Annie’s friends.

At this juncture I interposed.

‘Excepting Uncle Isaac, they are no friends of mine, Madame. It is very kind of you and Herr Droigel to wish to have them here, but I hope you will let them go into lodgings. So far as I am concerned, I have no desire for the same roof to cover me and Mrs Isaac Motfield.’

‘But she is an aunt of thine,’ suggested Madame, in a tone of reproach.

‘That is not my fault, though it may be my misfortune,’ I replied. ‘We have never been on good terms—we never shall be. If she comes here, we shall quarrel the whole time ; for, if her children have grown up as they seemed to promise, they must be miracles of ill-breeding.’

‘Didst thou ever hear, Droigel, such words as these ?’ began Madame, whom I had roused on her weak point. A large circle of relatives was her idea of perfect happiness. In her own family there were perpetually recurring birth or marriage days ; and on New-year’s eve we were wont either to receive or visit various utterly uninteresting people, who called each other *du*, and embraced and conversed in a patois of bad German and worse

English, and sang songs concerning the Vaterland, and decorated their apartments with flowers and small pots of moss and sprigs of evergreen, and who, it is to be hoped, enjoyed the festivities vastly.

To me the whole thing had become almost unendurable. They were not unkind people—no doubt they were admirable and estimable in their way—but the utter want of variety in their remarks and modes of entertaining themselves made me dread a natal or a wedding day with a sinking of heart impossible to describe.

Herr Droigel retained sufficient ‘of the sentiment of his romantic land’ to express the most profound regret when circumstances compelled his absence; but I shrewdly suspected he had lived long enough amongst literary and artistic people to see the absurdity and feel the monotony of these family gatherings.

When he did attend one of them, he bore his part bravely, ate and drank, and played accompaniments and danced—yes, danced. I myself have trod a measure with him, and the performance was witnessed, not merely with gravity, but approval by the spectators.

To Madame, however, visiting her relatives constituted the dissipation of her life. For no consideration would she have forgotten an anniversary of birth, death, marriage, or betrothal. A new sister-in-law, nephew, niece, cousin, aroused all her susceptibilities; and the idea of any person having a relation whom he or she regarded with positive dislike, was something too terrible to realize.

Hitherto I had prudently kept my sentiments well in the background, and the suddenness and frankness of my speech filled her with a terrible astonishment.

‘It is wicked,’ she went on. ‘I never thought so gentle an one as thou could talk in that bad, sinful way.’

‘I cannot help it, Madame. If it is bad and sinful to speak the truth, then indeed I am wicked as you say. I dislike Mrs Isaac Motfield intensely. I am very sorry my uncle ever married her. Perhaps she has made him a good wife—I know nothing about that—but she made me a very bad aunt, and her coming

to London will spoil all the pleasure I expected from my uncle's visit.'

'What dost thou think of this?' asked Madame, turning to her husband once again.

'I think with you, my treasure, it is very terrible to have a niece utter such decidedly antagonistic observations concerning her admirable aunt; but—'

'My aunt was not admirable to me,' I interrupted; 'and I see no reason why I should not prevent her staying here, if my opinion can effect so desirable an object. She is less disagreeable and more honest than Mrs Daniel Motfield; but that is not saying very much in her favour.'

'Had you permitted the finishing of my sentence,' remarked Herr Droigel, 'you would have found it not necessary to enlarge upon this unpleasant subject. My melody was not complete. You cut the air in two. I was about to modulate into another key, and proceed thus:— But the English nature is different from the German; it has fewer tendrils; it winds itself not readily, though, when it does, the strength of its affection is great. Farther, the artiste temperament is irritable and sensitive; it has its little notches—its difficulties. Evident is it that the spirits of our Annie and the wife of that good uncle Isaac are not *en rapport*. We will not have the hair of our kitten rubbed the wrong way. Sensible Mr Motfield's commands shall be obeyed to the letter. Those to whom I should have been proud and happy to offer my poor hospitalities shall lodge themselves elsewhere.'

'You will not repent your decision,' I said, 'when you see my amiable relatives—and hear them, too, for that matter. My cousins play and sing.'

'Not as Annie plays and sings,' he suggested.

'In their own opinion a vast deal better, I have not the slightest doubt,' was my reply. 'However, it is years since we met, and they may have developed genius and amiability in the interim.'

'And in any event, when they come, you will remember—'

'That if my manners are not pretty, the sin may be laid at

'your door,' I finished, as he hesitated how to word his request. 'Be tranquil. I will put on my best bib-and-tucker and my best behaviour at the same time, and not sing a note if I have even to catch a bad cold to avoid doing so.'

'Perverse one!' exclaimed the Professor, with a pensive smile. 'Is she not a spoiled child, this Annie of ours?' he added, addressing Madame.

To his infinite astonishment Madame said I was, and said it very much as if she meant it. She could not forgive the blow I had struck at the very roots of family affection, and went sailing out of the room with so comical an air of displeasure and contempt, that her husband involuntarily raised his eyebrows and his shoulders, and, turning to me, uttered the word 'Soh!' three times, with a crescendo of such exceeding amazement, that I defy any human being with the smallest sense of the ludicrous to have kept from laughing.

Madame heard the laugh, and imputed it to me as sin. Great trees grow from small seeds. Herr Droigel did not know the nature of the event he had, by his astonishment, planted that day to mature for our mutual benefit.

One day I had a letter from my uncle, in which he explained the mystery of his coming to London accompanied by so many of his household gods. Jemima Jane, to whom reference was made in the early part of this story as the wearer of my clothes, the appropriatress of my trinkets, had, like me, achieved success, only in a different direction. Her charms had fascinated the son of the woollen-draper; and although, by reason of his large family, my uncle could not give his daughter so large a *dot* as had been mentally settled by paternal affection as the value of the youth, still, in consideration of Mr Motfield's respectability, he gave way, and blessed the young lady.

When Herr Droigel's letter arrived, inviting my uncle to visit him, in order to see me and 'discuss future events,' Mrs Motfield seized the idea and enlarged upon it—why not give her an outing too?—and Jemima Jane as well. The trousseau could be provided so much better, so much cheaper, in London, and then they should see the sights.

Farther, they should see me, concerning whom they had conflicting notions, gathered from memory and the newspapers—the first suggesting a disagreeable, insignificant chit of a child—the last filling them with wonder at the idea of a relation of theirs being styled a promising *débutante*, and getting into print at all. On the sole occasion when I met my relations after leaving Lovendale, Mrs Isaac Motfield, having, as may be remembered, another engagement, did not accompany her husband to Alford.

There was nothing accordingly to bridge over the chasm of time that had passed since Mrs Isaac declared ‘such goings on as mine she would not have in her house ;’ and it was only natural she and her daughters should desire to see with their own eyes the sort of animal ‘Annie Trenet might be, who sang in public and could afford to make her uncle a present of a gold watch and chain.

That watch and chain produced a great effect in Fairport.

Uncle Isaac declared laughingly, that it turned the scale in Jemima Jane’s behalf ; and Herr Droigel said—

‘Ah ! how many a true word is uttered in jest ! What a world this is, where every one is mercenary ! every one sooner or later—I am mercenary !’

‘You won’t make me believe that readily,’ my uncle answered, with frank heartiness.

For pleasure, business cannot stand still ; and though that Fairport letter kept me in an agony of expectation, I went on with my work just as though no kind tried friend were coming to visit London.

We were close on the end of the season, which was not prolonged so late into the summer as is the case now ; and, as is usual at the end of all seasons which have been exceptionally gay and brilliant, the pulse of society seemed to be beating faster than ever. Balls and parties of all sorts followed each other in rapid succession, whilst in the musical world an activity prevailed which was marvellous—concert succeeding to concert, each largely and fashionably attended.

Had Herr Droigel been gifted with foreknowledge, he could not have chosen a better year for ‘bringing me out.’

A twelvemonth before, I was but a scholar trembling at Herr Droigel's frown—wondering whether I should ever be able to sing so that any one might care to hear me ; and now I had to appear once, sometimes twice, a day before an ever-changing public, and it was arranged we—the Professor and myself—were, when the London season was over, to join a party intending to make a provincial tour.

Everything was new to me—almost everything pleasant. I had not yet attained sufficient distinction to provoke jealousy, and Herr Droigel was judicious in two matters ; he always spoke humbly—almost depreciatingly—of my voice, and sedulously abstained from forcing me on the attention of older singers.

If any one who had not noticed me before said, ‘Who is she ?—is that the new voice ?’ he would answer, ‘It is only my little girl,’ or, ‘My adopted child,’ until I came to be familiarly known by no other appellations than these—unless, indeed, that of ‘Droigel’s baby.’

This used to vex me mightily at the time, though I was wise enough to hide my annoyance ; but, looking back, it seems to me that much of the kindly toleration and friendly assistance I experienced in those days were attributable to my sobriquet, rather than to any inherent virtue possessed by myself.

I was as one walking unharmed because unarmed amongst them all. I could sing, of course, and did sing ; but still they only thought of me as a child—a baby—of my fat, plausible, self-constituted parent.

He appeared the butt of the artistes’ room ; the moment he entered seemed the signal for jest and merriment.

‘I am so glad you have come,’ was the way in which one singer would greet him ; ‘you are an awful humbug ; but I could better spare a better man.’

‘Oh, here is the dear papa Droigel !’ another would cry, and straightway kiss him ; and then around would arise a Babel of languages, each man and each woman appealing to the new-comer in his or her own especial tongue.

Amongst them, he looked like Gulliver amongst the Lilliputians. He listened to the jabber around with a benign smile,

though sometimes, when hard pressed, he would say, with a sigh, 'Ah, my dears, you are too hard upon the old father who has indulged you all these years.'

'And who acknowledges a most degenerate family of children,' remarked a lady whose English was so good that it puzzled me when Herr Droigel said she was a Hungarian, and spoke six languages with equal correctness.

'She is simply the cleverest woman I ever knew,' he said. 'Gott in Himmel! she has the energy of a dozen men. No marvel her husband died within three months of his marriage. She would do any man to death unless he had ten lives. I can remember her thirty years, and during the whole of that time she has never been sick, or hoarse, or tired, or laid up with the vapours or—her temper, though one would have thought that a malady in itself.'

'Thirty years!' I exclaimed. 'Why, she is quite young now!'

'She must be fifty-five now, at the very smallest computation; and as you remember, Annie dear, a Scotch lady remarked that at fifty people do begin to lose the bloom of youth. She has managed to preserve hers, however, as admirably as she manages to do everything else.'

'But you must be mistaken,' I persisted; 'why, look at her hair!'

'I have,' he answered, 'often.'

'It is black as jet,' I continued.

'True.'

'And yet you say she is fifty-five?'

'I know her age—concerning that of her wig, I have no information!'

'Do you mean to tell me she wears a wig?' I cried.

'Yes, but not a common wig. Like everything else she makes her own, it is unique. Her art is so perfect that it seems more natural than nature. She is wonderful, magnificent, superb.'

And Herr Droigel rolled out these words in a tone of simple faith, holding up his hands the while, as if imploring Heaven to bear witness to his sincerity in uttering them.

‘Who was the lady,’ I went on to inquire, ‘that was singing when we got there, and who afterwards, when every one else was laughing and talking, sat apart looking over her music? You bowed to her.’

‘That lady—it pleases me to think you noticed her thus specially—that lady is a saint. She sings in public, and is supposed to pray in private. She has solved the English puzzle of using her talents professionally, and being received almost on an equality in good society. In her way, she is cleverer than our old-young Hungarian. She has found out practically “how to make the best of both worlds,” as illustrious Mr Binney states theoretically is possible. She has the ear of Exeter Hall. The clergy consider her faultless—original sin, which is no fault of hers, alone excepted. She has the American aptitude for making money, and the British talent of keeping it when made. She does not mix much with other artists. She is in the singing world, but not of it. No Sunday visiting for her. She receives not on that day, unless it may be a Dean or a Bishop, or some great lady. She goes to her church in the morning, and then occupies herself in signing copies all the afternoon. An admirable creature—“a crown to her husband,” as the Wise Man says. Her royalties alone must be a pretty penny. We love not each other. She will sing not my songs. I—well, I—do not help her to pupils when a father or mother condescends to ask my advice. Her real name was Stubbs; her father a carpenter at Peterborough. One of the clergy-in-waiting at the cathedral—canon is the word, is it not?—heard her voice, and got the organist to instruct it. She has lived under the wings of the Church ever since. With the approval of her patrons, she dropped the Stubbs, and came out as Miss Adela Hawtrey.’

In describing this part of my life, I am vague and inconsequent of necessity, because it was some time before the places at which I appeared and the people I met formed themselves into sharp outline before me. It was all so new that I felt like one who, having lived far from towns, is suddenly set down in the midst of a crowded city. Everything seemed confused and unreal. Unaccustomed as I was to society and excitement, I

walked through the first portion of my new existence like one in a dream.

‘If I had ever imagined that when my public career began drudgery would be over, I should soon have been disabused of this impression.

Not merely had I to work as hard as ever myself, but every one with whom I came in contact worked hard also. Singing, such as should please the multitude, was not, I found, intuitive. Nothing appalled me so much as the ceaseless study I beheld around me. Did we go to the house of an artiste, she was either learning herself or instructing somebody else. Over rehearsals we slaved—I can use no other expression; whilst we waited our turn to appear on the platform, we were poring over our music, humming difficult passages, perfecting our pronunciation.

Sunday, which might have been reserved for rest, was the favourite and appointed time for hearing new songs, for trying over part-music, for making acquaintances, for receiving visits, that all more or less partook of a business character. As little, perhaps, as Miss Hawtrey—who, by the way, was married, and the mother of four children—did I like this mode of keeping the day holy; but what could I do? I was in a vortex which left no time for expostulation or for thought. I had sailed hitherto through quiet seas; and in a moment, so it seemed to me, I was whirling round and round in a perfect maelstrom of excitement. What mission had I to set the world right? What power had I to keep myself right? I, who was surrounded on all hands by people holding either a different faith or no faith at all?

Two or three times it is true I ventured to hint to Herr Droigel that our manner of spending the first day in the week did not quite satisfy me; but he put aside my objection with—

‘My dear Annie, retain those sentiments; they are holy, they belong to the best part of our humanity. Unfortunately we cannot always act up to our sentiments. Ah, what a world this would be were that possible! A certain number of people have to work on Sundays—clergymen, organists, choristers, policemen, engine-drivers, and singers. It is lamentable it should

be necessary; but the fact remains. Happily it is not all the year round: once the season is over, we can be quiet and religious as we like.'

It would have been a great change for Herr Droigel, had he liked to be the latter. Spite of his words in Alford churchyard, I had long been aware of that fact; but there was no use in seeming to take him at other than his own estimate.

I was in the stream now, and had to go with the current. Our Sundays were a part and parcel of the unreality of my life. Often I wondered, when listening to a Babel of tongues, or to a bit of practice from an opera, whether it was myself who stood in the midst of that throng or another—the Annie Trenet of days that seemed hundreds of years distant, or a changeling who, having surreptitiously entered that little cottage overlooking the Love, had performed freaks of which no true Motfield would have been guilty—freaks ending in this.

And what struck me with the greatest wonder was, that whilst I had an unceasing sense of wrong-doing oppressing me, no one else had. In my Pharisaism, if it were necessary to do the thing at all, I would have done it in secret. Like the lady who told her little boy to play his marbles in the back yard—which order elicited the inquiry whether it were Sunday there—I should scarcely have elected to make our performances public. But no one appeared to dream there was anything to be ashamed of in the matter.

It was business, as Herr Droigel said; and if there were work to be done, there was no reason why the windows should be closed and the doors barred whilst the work was in progress.

What the neighbours thought of it troubled me at first; but I soon understood that on much lower grounds than religious scruples no one who was strait-laced would rent a house next door to a professional musician.

After all, who would like to hear Beethoven's sonatas for eight hours a day? and pianoforte practice is soothing as laudanum compared to vocal.

Sometimes my senses seemed leaving me amid the musical confusion in which we lived.

‘You do not appear to like this much,’ said Herr Droigel to me, as one lovely night we walked home together; ‘and yet I have a memory of hearing consistent Annie once remark that she was so fond of music, she could listen to it for ever.’

‘I spoke without knowledge then,’ I answered. ‘One may like good living, and yet still not care to be eating perpetually. It seems to me we are like cooks in a kitchen—seeing, smelling, tasting perpetually. I thought this evening what a blessing deafness would prove.’

‘Ah, you mean when that new tenor was making such a diabolic noise.’

‘Then, and—and all the time. If the public lived, moved, and had their being to the sound of music as we have, they would never go to a concert, and the opera-houses might be closed.’

‘And yet,’ he replied, ‘I dare affirm you were the only ennuyed individual present. Music is the business of artistes. Some day you will take an interest as keen in business as they do.’

‘Perhaps,’ I said.

‘For certain,’ he answered; ‘and it will not be long before that time arrives. You will have to work hard to catch up to the singers more old, more experienced, than you; and when you are older and have learned much, you will have to go on learning to prevent the young singers catching up and passing you.’

To this I made no reply. The view presented of my employments through life did not seem particularly captivating.

It was whilst incidents and persons were flitting past me in the misty uncertain manner I have tried to describe, that my Uncle Isaac arrived in London.

He came unexpectedly, to me at least, and our meeting was in this wise.

A hot close day had been succeeded by a still more sultry evening. Every window in our house was set wide open to catch any stray breath of air which might be wandering about; but none chanced to be abroad. It was an evening when to live

seemed difficult, and to sing impossible ; and yet I stood before the glass taking a farewell glance at myself before appearing before that public which would, I believe, go to a ball or a theatre if the thermometer stood at two hundred in the shade.

That friend of Herr Droigel, to whom, at an earlier period of my London experience, I had sung ere starting for the Continent, was giving his concert of the season, and we were to assist in making it go off well.

He was not a public singer himself, but a celebrated teacher. He was petted by the aristocracy. It was 'the thing' to take lessons from him at a fabulous price per ten minutes. Young ladies, whose performances might have made any one with an ear for music gnash his teeth, passed muster—were indeed made much of in stately country houses—because they had been pupils of Signor Dellaro.

Had any one mentioned their names in that connection to Signor Dellaro, he would have said with a languid drawl—

‘ I have heard them sing.’

Rare indeed were the instances when Dellaro roused himself to teach, which most probably was the reason of his popularity : one of the reasons, to speak more correctly, since his indolence, insolence, extortionate charges, no doubt exercised the charm of novelty on those accustomed to consider teachers of any kind mere cattle to be driven.

Be this as it may, however, Dellaro’s career had been a triumph—such a triumph, in fact, that he could afford to be generous, and when off guard, occasionally jovial.

In the early part of his career Droigel had stood his friend, and Dellaro was not ungrateful. The consequence of all this being, so far as his acts concerned me, that, spite of his being *very* particular as to the artistes who appeared at his concerts, he was graciously pleased to observe that if Droigel’s baby would sing one of his, Dellaro’s, songs, he should be gratified. Not more gratified than Droigel, however—for that I can answer.

‘ The *crème de la crème* would praise his *Annie*,’ he declared :

the lean dowagers, the well-developed mammas, the daughters so charming, all would be secured at a coup.'

'If I did my part—and he hated himself for that "if," which suggested a distrust he did not feel—my name would within a week appear on the piano of every fashionable drawing-room in the United Kingdom.'

In imagination, Herr Droigel already beheld me presented, in bold letters, to the attention of British aristocracy thus :

In Silent Hours.

SONG.

Composed, and by permission dedicated to Lady Muriel Brooks,

BY

THEODORE DELLARO.

Sung by MISS TRENET.

'Ah, my child,' he said, with a mournful shake of his head, 'what a future might not be yours if, with the divine gift of voice, you were but possessed with a mortal passion for fame!'

'So I am,' I answered; 'I want to receive more applause than Miss Hawtrey.'

'Good, good!' exclaimed my master, laughing approvingly; 'go and get thee ready, little maiden, and the slipper shall yet be fitted to thy foot; Cinderella and Droigel's child shall come to great honour.'

Thus it came about I was dressed on that particular evening in all my best, and ready in good time to start with Herr Droigel for the concert-room.

We were early, but there had been previous arrivals, and I found myself amongst quite a crowd of artistes listening to the usual Babel of tongues and confusion of languages. There was the prima donna of the opposition Opera-house—talking to her was a new tenor, who had made his bow to an English audience for the first time that season: ah, how smooth and sweet flowed on the soft Italian utterances in contrast to the German gabble that came from a group on my right hand!

There was a lady whose dress seemed to occupy the whole

room. At first, I thought her beautiful, but a nearer view dispelled this illusion. She was sighing and gasping, and uttering the word 'Ach !' in every possible tone of misery.

Droigel asked her what was the matter, and she told him she had no voice—no, not one note—she had caught a cold so fearful ; and then she laid her hand upon an acre of neck made white as snow by judicious art, and sighed again.

'We have all colds,' she went on, 'all, except Mademoiselle Hawtrey, and she never has a cold, and is never out of voice, and never discomposed. Bah ! look at her.'

And we did look at that estimable lady, who with calm face and smooth manner was asking Signor Dellaro some questions concerning a song she held in her hand. She hummed a passage in it, to ascertain if her reading were correct.

'That is not right, I am sure,' said Herr Droigel's Hungarian friend, never pausing in her onward passage to utter this pleasant remark, but flinging it, Parthian-like, behind her.

Miss Hawtrey raised her eyebrows and looked at Signor Dellaro. But the strong-minded lady proved right. The reading was not correct ; and here, at the outset of the evening, were the elements for a crash amongst the harmony.

Such a Babel—in one corner the lady with the hundred yards of tulle, trying at once to save her skirts from damage, and to perfect herself in the words of an English, or rather a Scotch ballad—which, utterly indifferent to the confusion around, she rehearsed out loud.

Anything like that recitation I never heard. She enlisted me into the service, and I did my best to put her right, but it was useless, as she immediately went wrong.

'The, not ze—and for, not four,' exclaimed the Hungarian, so close at her ear that she dropped the music, and with a tragic expression placed both hands on her heart.

'Mein Gott,' she said to me, 'dat woman she is awful. No, not for no money would I have her energy, it is dreadful ;' and then, with a heart-rending sigh and little husky cough, she turned once again to her task.

At last the concert began ; there was nothing in the opening

piece to interest any of us, and so we remained in our room, hearing every now and then some tremendous bang on the piano and the cries of a violin in acutest agony.

‘Dere, dat is over at last, and a goot thing too,’ said my companion ; ‘de next is a quartette. Who sings ?—O, I see.’

After that there was a move ; we all crowded as close to the door leading to the stage as we could get, in order to hear the ‘bright particular star.’

She sang magnificently. ‘But she is not—no, she is not Serlini,’ observed Herr Droigel ; for which remark the new tenor at once took him to task.

‘I should think not,’ said the gentleman scornfully, in rapid Italian. ‘I should hope not—her voice is a miracle—herself perfection. Serlini !’ and here, at a loss how to express his contempt for that popular favourite, he began to wander amongst the names of all the saints contained in his calendar, and called upon them to witness how superior was the Countess *prima donna* to anything which had ever gone before or ever could come after her.

For a time Droigel listened, then he broke out in German ; and not the less terrible was his wrath to hear uttered in that language, because he was obliged to speak almost in a whisper.

Like a torrent he swept on. What did the tenor know about music, or singing, or acting, or—bah ! Serlini needed no knight to tilt for her—England, Europe, the world, were her admirers ; all nations shranked her in their hearts. She was *the prima donna*—not of a season, but of all time—not of one country, but of every land.

‘For heaven’s sake be quiet,’ said the Hungarian, at this juncture seizing his arm ; ‘the house will hear you ;’ which, indeed, was extremely probable, seeing the singer was at that moment executing a cadenza to the delight of an audience so still that they seemed almost to hold their breath to listen ; and Signor Dellaro—hands suspended over the piano, waiting for her to come to earth again—was looking anxiously and angrily towards the curtain, behind which we stood peeping.

What a storm of applause ! It filled the room like a strong

wind ; it sank, and then began again, over and over. Vainly Madame la Comtesse tried to leave the platform. The audience would not hear of it ; there is a moment's dead silence, and through the stillness her notes rang out ; and we, who being singers ourselves might have been supposed slightly indifferent to the singing of another, listened spell-bound.

‘ Everything must sound flat after that,’ said Miss Hawtrey, with a pretty modesty. ‘ I wish I had not to sing to-night.’

‘ So do I,’ exclaimed the Hungarian, and at this there was a titter, because her words, though apparently innocent, held a double meaning, which we understood perfectly.

‘ We could not spare *you*, Madame Szeredy,’ said Herr Droigel, gallantly ; which I thought was going a little too far, and so tried most imprudently to say something civil to Miss Hawtrey.

‘ I do not think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance,’ she remarked, and turned her back upon me.

‘ I should think the pleasure of that acquaintance would be all on one side, like some people’s reciprocity,’ murmured an Irishman, with a rich brogue, and of course we tittered again.

There is no place in the world where the sense of weariness is so great, and the sense of thankfulness for even a very small joke so keen, as in the artistes’ room. If the joke have a flavour of personal bitterness, it is relished naturally all the more.

After the prima donna, and by way of a sensible break between her and the next vocalist, came a pianoforte solo ; then singer succeeded to singer. The Hungarian, who, having been engaged in a sharp passage of words with an impracticable bass, who had ventured to disagree with her, left us with the expression of a devil, and was next moment smiling like an angel to the audience ; Miss Hawtrey, who was received with enthusiasm as an old and established favourite ; the tenor, who took part in a trio ; my friend, who had forgotten the pronunciation of every word—which was of the less consequence, as no human being could hear a distinct syllable ; then ten minutes’ interval—during which we had most of us wine, a few of us water ; than a general shaking-out dresses on part of the ladies, and much contempla-

tion of themselves in mirrors on the part of the gentlemen ; then the performances re-opened with a duet ; and then—

‘ Courage, Annie ! ’ said Herr Droigel.

As we passed Miss Hawtrey, I saw her touch her companion the tenor, who looked at me with an amused smile, whilst she kept her eyes fixed on my face with an insolent stare.

‘ You are trying to make me nervous,’ I thought. ‘ Well, we shall see ; ’ and with heightened colour, and my head held a little more erect than usual, I passed on.

The audience was in high good humour. No person except a singer can have an idea of the difference it makes whether those who have preceded her have been good or the reverse. So far the concert had proved exceptionally successful. The vocalists and instrumentalists had done their best, the selections were judicious, the accompanying perfection ; and the consequence of all this was that when I appeared on the platform there arose such a tempest of clapping, that I had to curtsey an exceptional number of times, and Droigel was obliged to pause before commencing the accompaniment.

Then I opened my music—I could sing without it, but the sheet gave me a sort of artificial courage—and began.

The song was simply exquisite. It is one that to this day sells in that mysterious manner in which some old songs do sell, though no human being can imagine who buys them. It was a simple melody, linked to charming words ; and I suppose I must have sung it well, for the applause which followed was sufficient to make Miss Hawtrey’s heart stand still with amazement.

‘ You have made them weep,’ said Droigel, as, proud and happy, he followed me down the steps and behind the curtain, where stood Dellaro, radiant with delight.

‘ I could kiss you, child ; you are a marvel,’ he exclaimed ; ‘ but you will have to go on again—do not you hear them ? ’

I did hear them ; I was not deaf ; and the clapping was louder than ever, when I, led on by the Signor, re-appeared to make my curtsey. That was not, however, all they wanted.

‘ The last two verses,’ said Dellaro, in a hurried whisper : and

he seated himself at the piano, in order to save time and prevent confusion.

He did not accompany so well as Droigel ; but what mattered that ? I was warm to my work, and could have sung just as well without any instrument at all.

I had won my spurs that night ; I knew it, I felt it. The ball was at my feet, the full goblet at my lips. Yes, I had done all, and more than all my most sanguine friends had ever prophesied.

The hearts of the people were touched. I, Annie Trenet, had done it : I had brought tears to eyes I might never look into—sent never-to-be-forgotten sounds into ears no spoken word of mine might, save in song, ever reach. I was triumphant ; I felt almost delirious in my joy as I walked back into the artistes' room, clapping and applause still following my retiring steps.

' I beg to congratulate you most heartily,' said Miss Hawtrey, rising, and coming to meet me.

Whilst I was answering her with what grace I might, some one said, sarcastically, ' The king is dead ; long live the king ! ' and she winced and turned white, as though she had received a blow. Just then Herr Droigel came hurrying up to me.

' Put on your wraps, dear child, and let us get away. Thou art tired, and there's yet another pleasure for thee.'

I clasped my fur tippet—in those days jackets as yet were not—drew a hood over my head, and slipped my hand into his arm.

We descended the stairs, threaded the passages, and gained the vestibule of the private entrance.

' What is it ? ' I had panted out as he hurried me along.

Now he answered—

' Who is that ? '

A man stood near the doorway in deep shadow. I could not see his face, but I guessed who it was in a moment.

' Uncle Isaac ! ' I cried ; and as he stretched out his arms, I flung mine round his neck, and kissed him over and over again.

' I am so glad—so glad ! ' was all I could say.

' And so am I,' he replied. ' Oh, Nannie, if my mother

could but have lived to come with me and hear you sing as you sang to-night !'

' Do you think she would have liked it ? ' I asked.

' Liked it ! I suppose, Nan, I ought to be ashamed to confess, but I am not ; I have been crying like a child.'

All this time Herr Droigel stood apart, blowing his nose ostentatiously.

' Was not Droigel right ? ' he said as we drove home all together, shaking his fist in the face of some imaginary antagonist.

' Was he not, you just tell me that ? Ha ! '

CHAPTER XXX.

MY RELATIONS.

My uncle supped with us that night. When we reached home I ran up-stairs, took off my fur tippet and evening finery, put on a plain muslin dress, and went down to ask ' if I did not look more like myself ? '

' I do not think the old self is much changed,' said my uncle, fondly. A happy man was he. Once or twice he laid down his knife and fork, and turned round to look at me nestling close beside him.

' Now I wonder whether I am awake or dreaming ? ' he remarked, at length. ' I must pinch myself to find out.'

' "If Giles, I've lost two horses, to my cost.
If not, odd bodkins ! I have found a cart,"'

I quoted gleefully. ' Uncle, were you not very proud of me to-night ? ' I can assure you I felt very glad of myself—to borrow a phrase from Signor Dellaro.

' Why most particular to-night ? ' inquired Madame.

' I am modest,' I answered ; ' ask Herr Droigel.'

' Because,' he said—' Ach ! how can I reproduce the scene ? —because she sang as she has sung never before—because she

took the house with her, and made that being angelic, Miss Hawtrey, turn white with envy—because to-night more than ever she is the child of Droigel—his soul child—to express my stupid thought.'

'I am sure Annie and I owe a debt of gratitude to you we can never repay,' remarked my uncle. But the Professor put this aside with a wave of his hand.

'It might have been a matter of business and interest once,' he said, with a mixture of pathos and tenderness, 'but that time has gone and passed. Between her and Gretchen his love now could distinguish no difference. Is it not so, wife of mine?' he asked, turning to Madame for confirmation of this, as he did when she was present of all other deviations from truth.

'Yes.' Madame could not say the reverse; so great was his love that had her Gretchen not a disposition most amiable, she might have cause for jealousy.

'Absurd, mother!' exclaimed Gretchen, in anything rather than an amiable manner.

'My child!' said Herr Droigel, reprovingly.

'True, papa,' observed Gretchen, quickly, 'it was very rude, and I beg pardon; but the idea of my being jealous of Annie!' And to my intense surprise she came round from where she sat and kissed me. 'Papa may be as fond of you as he likes,' she went on, addressing my astonished self, 'but he could not make me jealous. Remember that—no one could make me jealous of you;' and then with a heightened colour she returned to her seat, while I, to change a conversation which had suddenly turned into a dangerous, and to me unintelligible channel, asked my uncle about Mrs Isaac and the children, Tommy especially.

Next morning I had the pleasure of seeing my aunt and the young ladies. I walked round before breakfast to their lodgings, which were close at hand, and had the pleasure of partaking of that meal with those who were, so said my aunt, 'my own blood-relations—and blood is thicker than water, you know, my dear,' she added, as if stating some curious physical fact caviare to the multitude.

On the whole, looking at my relations, I thought I preferred water. Time and prosperity had not improved my aunt's appearance: the former had rendered her very stout and florid, the latter had caused her to affect dresses of staring colours and remarkable patterns. She had attained to the possession of that massive cable-pattern chain mentioned in an early part of this story, and her manner was a curious mixture of self-assertion and subserviency.

She always seemed on the point of lording her position over me as in the old times departed, but changed her tone when she suddenly remembered my position was as good as hers.

'Not quite so respectable,' she took care to inform me before she left London, 'as might have been wished; but then people cannot pick and choose, and it is wonderful how lucky you have been.'

It never occurred to Mrs Isaac that my own endeavours had in the smallest degree contributed to my success; she regarded the whole matter as she might a fortunate draw in a lottery—which way of regarding artistic success is not, I find, uncommon.

In my aunt's estimation, had Heaven been just or the fates auspicious, Jemima Jane or some other of her daughters, should have attracted the notice of Herr Droigel, in which case, as she concisely stated her opinion to the Professor, 'There would have been something to show for the money.'

'You are an epigrammatic dear lady,' answered the Professor, which phrase Mrs Isaac happily took to mean something eminently complimentary, and said afterwards to her friends at Fairport that 'Really, *for a German*, Herr Droigel seemed a very intelligent sort of person.'

I could not—though I have always tried to abstain from fetching and carrying—resist repeating this utterance to my master, who laughed at it till his sides ached.

Indeed, I fear he and I took a considerable amount of amusement out of Mrs Isaac. If we talked a little less about the follies and vulgarities of her offspring, it was only human—they chanced, unhappily, to be Uncle Isaac's children as well.

Those were the days when extremely full dresses were worn—

full at the bottom, equally full at the waist—and my cousins had thought it necessary to develop an amount of bustle and of gathers and double gathers on their hips, which gave them an extraordinary appearance. Bodices were then worn peaked or rounded in front, and fastened up behind with hooks and eyes. A back as flat as a pasteboard, and of immense length, was considered part of a 'fine figure' at Fairport, I discovered; and I found also, from listening to my aunt's conversation, that the greater the number of breadths which could be coaxed into a skirt the more fashionable it was considered.

'You mayn't believe me,' said Mrs Isaac, who evidently considered my attire behind the age, 'but Jemima has ten breaths'—thus she pronounced 'breadths'—'in that gown she is wearing, and every one is a yard wide. Get up, dear, and let your cousin see.'

I did see. Jemima Jane arose, and favoured me with a view of her person. She was well-grown and large-boned—altogether the sort of frame on which a light blue dress, with an immense checked pattern, might be supposed to show to advantage.

'It's very stylish and genteel,' suggested my aunt.

'It is very uncommon,' I assented.

'We said, when we see Annie we'll see the fashions,' she went on, looking disparagingly at my dress; 'but you never were much of a one for showing off clothes, or making the most of yourself.'

'I am afraid I was not,' I replied; 'but you will see plenty of dress and fashion when you go into Regent Street and the Park.'

'Of course, Annie, you are going to show us the lions!' interposed Jemima Jane, turning her engaged ring round and round a stubby red finger.

'I am not my own mistress,' I answered, with a smile born of gratitude at the thought.

'Tut, tut!' exclaimed Mrs Isaac, jubilantly; 'we'll ask your teacher to give you a holiday.'

'Thank you, aunt,' I said demurely.

Just then my uncle entered, accompanied by Herr Droigel.

Already the former had taken a walk into the Strand, thence through St James's Park, returning by the Horse Guards ; then he had walked down Parliament Street and crossed Westminster Bridge, making his way back by Blackfriars and Fleet Street, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and a few other short cuts to our house, north of what was then called the City Road. There he picked up Herr Droigel, who had happily already breakfasted, and who, smiling benignantly, was introduced to Mrs Isaac and the young ladies.

'I was just saying,' began my aunt, after her offer of weak tea and cold toast had been declined, 'that we would ask you to give Annie a holiday. We want to buy some things.' Then she looked mysterious, and the girls commenced to giggle.

'Herr Droigel knows all about the matter, my dear,' said her husband.

'Well, indeed, it would have been too bad to make a stranger of you after all you have done for Annie,' she went on, directing her reply to the Professor ; 'and there is nothing to be ashamed of that I can see in a daughter being about to settle herself suitably and respectably——'

'Ashamed, Madame !' cried Herr Droigel. 'It is a thing to glory in—to rejoice over. And which young Miss is it that means to make her betrothed so happy ?'

'Oh, my eldest, of course,' said the proud mother, indicating Jemima, who coloured, and simpered, and bridled.

'Why of course ?' asked Droigel, innocently. 'There is no order of precedence in marriage in England, is there ?'

'Not exactly,' explained my aunt ; 'but first come first served, you know.'

'True : an adage most admirable. Ah ! what a fortunate man to be this young lady's choice ! And so you desire that Annie should assist in selecting the trousseau ? Her time, as you know, dear Madame, is much occupied, but still she shall go. Yes, we can manage it, Annie, is it not so ? But you must take care of yourself—no headache—no white tired face——'

'Annie isn't delicate,' interposed Mrs Isaac ; 'she always looked thin and pale, but she never ailed like my children.'

Little as any one might think it, I have known my girls forced to go to bed ill, while their cousin played herself about on the sands.'

Which was indeed quite true ; but then her girls were given to over-eating, and even had my inclinations been in that direction, there would have lain no possible means of gratifying them.

'Strange !' mused Herr Droigel. 'And yet your young misses now put the cheeks of my Annie to reproach. They look indeed in insolent health.'

'You mean rude health, don't you, Herr Droigel ?' I suggested, laughing at his assumption of ignorance at my aunt's look of horrified astonishment.

'Are the words not identical ?' he inquired, surveying us all with a bland smile. 'My dear Madame, forgive this stupid fellow. Out of my music I am a fool.'

'We can't allow that, can we, papa ?' said Mrs Isaac, her good humour restored, appealing to the father of her children. 'So Annie may come ?' she went on. 'I am sure she ought to be very much obliged to you.'

'Herr Droigel is aware of my sentiments, aunt,' I remarked.

'But, Madame, pardon,' began the Professor, 'I am dull, and I cannot see how this dear Annie will help the momentous choice. You take her into a shop, and set her down before a counter. Shopman brings rolls of silks and satins. Annie would buy anything she was told. She is still a child—a baby. If you want help, judgment, some one able to talk to the British tradesman, take my Gretchen. Aha ! I tell our Annie her little gift of song should have come to Gretchen—that she is in unlawful possession of stolen goods.'

'I think that myself,' said Mrs Isaac. 'It is better to be born lucky than rich, as the saying is. And Annie has been a lucky girl. I only hope she is sufficiently thankful for all the good fortune that has dropped into her lap. When I look back and think about her, the whole story seems like a fairy tale.'

'So it does to me,' I remarked, 'extremely like Cinderella and the glass slipper, only I have neither seen nor danced with the Prince as yet.'

'Annie, Annie,' remonstrated the Professor, in a stage whisper, whilst Mrs Isaac coloured, and the girls tittered, and my uncle rising, said, 'If we mean to do anything to-day, had we not better be doing it without more delay?'

'Yes, yes,' cried Herr Droigel, eagerly, 'and you, dear sir, trust yourself to me, is it not so? whilst the ladies exchange their private confidences. Annie, if Gretchen can be of any service on your delicate mission, she is as ever ready to answer to your beck and call. We meet together at a friendly tea. Till then——' The remainder of the sentence was lost in an elaborate and comprehensive bow.

'What a funny man!' remarked Jemima Jane, as the door closed behind him.

'He is nice though, and good-natured,' said her sister.

'It is nothing short of a miracle that Annie should have fallen on such a friend,' observed Mrs Isaac. She did not approve of miracles being wrought in favour of any one outside her own family, and her tone expressed this feeling.

'I think I shall go round for Gretchen,' I began; 'she knows far more about shops and shopping than I do.'

'But remember you are to come with us as well,' exclaimed Jemima, who was sharp enough to understand I had meditated escaping from the expedition.

'Of course,' was my resigned answer.

'Cannot we go to Herr Droigel's with you?' asked my aunt.

'It would be out of your way. I shall be back by the time you and the girls are ready.' And without waiting for further suggestions, I ran down-stairs, and left the trio to criticize me at their leisure.

Gretchen I knew would impress them. I longed to see Mrs Isaac's face when she beheld that young person; and I walked rapidly homeward, thinking the while which dress I should like her to wear—which of her bonnets was most becoming to her.

'This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Trenet,' were the words that roused me from an imaginary contemplation of Gretchen, clad in a light blue muslin that I particularly admired, flecked with white spots, and flounced to perfection; and with a slight

start I stopped suddenly, and, looking up, found myself face to face with Mr Sylvester.

There he stood—the same handsome, courteous gentleman I could remember knowing by sight and hearsay for more than half my lifetime, but his manner was kinder and more cordial than I had ever felt it in my London experience of his acquaintance, and he smiled even while he apologized for startling me.

‘I was surprised to meet you all alone,’ he said; ‘I have just seen Miss Droigel, and she told me you were spending the day with some relatives.’

‘I shall have to spend it with them,’ I answered, so ruefully that he smiled again. ‘I am now on my way to ask Gretchen to go shopping with us.’

‘An occupation ladies delight in, I am told.’

‘I do not,’ was my reply. ‘Gretchen does though, I think; but then, she understands all about it—that makes such a difference.’

‘I suppose so. She delights in shopping for the same reason that you delight in music.’

‘I do not delight in music.’

‘What! tired of it already, notwithstanding the enthusiastic manner in which your song was received last night? I never heard more hearty applause.’

‘Were you there?’ I asked. ‘I did not see you.’

‘I was not in the reserved seats; I sat near your uncle, whom I knew by sight, and thought of introducing myself, and saying something I have decided I ought to repeat to you or him.’

‘What is it? why not say it to me?’

‘I will, having had the good fortune to meet you. You must remember how difficult—impossible, I might substitute—it has been to speak a sentence to you alone.’

‘I am not likely to forget that,’ I replied; ‘but Herr Droigel means it entirely for my good.’

‘The course he pursues is judicious,’ returned Mr Sylvester, ‘and I for one should not resent it, were his restrictions less sweeping. However, I have found my opportunity, and this is

what I want to say :—One day when Madame Serlini was speaking about you and Herr Droigel—observing what a marvellous teacher he was, and so forth—she remarked that she hoped your guardians, whoever they might be, would see you did not enter hastily into agreements for any lengthened period.'

'I do not exactly understand what you mean,' I said.

'You understand that, according to his own statement, Droigel is a child of nature.'

'Yes,' I answered, laughing.

'Well, then, what Madame Serlini evidently thinks is, that he is a child who knows much more of the world and its ways than you, and who will very probably try to make an exceedingly good thing out of your future.'

'But of course he expects to make money by my singing,' I replied.

'Of course ; but if you must sing, you ought to make money too—that is all. I hope you will not consider me officious or troublesome for having mentioned this matter to you ?'

'Oh ! no, indeed : I am most grateful.'

'Perhaps you will talk it over with your uncle ?'

'I think not,' I said, after a moment's hesitation.

'May I ask why not ?'

'You know what sort of person Herr Droigel is as well as I,' was my reply ; 'at least, perhaps not quite so well, but that makes no difference. Now, my uncle believes him to be precisely what he calls himself—a man who wears his heart on his sleeve.'

'And therefore——' suggested Mr Sylvester.

I paused.

'He is happy in knowing I have such a good home—that my welfare is looked after by one whom he imagines to be utterly unselfish and straightforward.'

'Yes ?' It was all my companion said, but it was interrogative.

'If I told him that Herr Droigel, though so kind to and fond of me, is—a—a—I scarcely know how to express myself.'

'Humbug,' added Mr Sylvester.

'I think that is what I mean,' I agreed, though a feeling I could scarcely define prevented my repeating the word. 'My uncle would get anxious about me, and he could do nothing—no one could do anything. Herr Droigel may not be always quite—true,' I went on, desperately, 'but next to my grandmother and Uncle Isaac he has been the best friend I ever had. I love them all—Herr Droigel, Madame, and Gretchen,—they have been good and kind to me; and I am very, very much obliged to you, but please do not say anything about this to any one, and I will not either.'

I held out my hand as I finished my sentence, feeling in a great flutter of nervousness and apprehension—nervousness at having spoken so freely to Mr Sylvester, apprehension lest Herr Droigel should by any evil chance pass that way, and see me talking to him.

'Good-bye,' said Mr Sylvester, with a grave smile; adding, 'then you think you are quite capable of taking care of yourself?'

'I am taken almost too much care of,' I answered. 'As to money, except that I wished to make a success, and prove what Gretchen calls a "good speculation," I have never given it a thought until now.'

'Pity you ever should have to give it a thought,' he remarked. 'If I can be of use to you at any time, remember you have another friend besides Herr Droigel and your uncle.'

He was gone, to my intense relief; he raised his hat, and turned slowly away. Never during the whole time passed under Herr Droigel's roof had I ever kept a secret from my master, and how I was to face Gretchen and tell her nothing of my interview, puzzled me not a little.

So great indeed was my perplexity that I went a little round, in order to compose my feelings; indeed, I took quite a *détour*, and thus added another sin to those already committed.

And yet there was a sense of guilty joy in my heart as I walked up one street, and along another, and down a third—I felt like a prisoner who has broken bounds; but still there was a sense of delight in remembering that I had been for a few minutes, that I was still for a few minutes, free. So much did

this novel sensation impress me, that I began to speculate whether one day I might not obtain my liberty altogether, and go about and see people as Gretchen did, unattended—without anybody saying me ‘yea’ or ‘nay.’

I was, however, notwithstanding all these audacious ideas, too much of a coward and a captive to dare prolong my walk; and so after a delay which certainly did not exceed ten minutes, I knocked at Herr Droigel’s door.

When she heard my voice, Gretchen came into the hall.

‘Your papa said you would go out with us to-day,’ I began; ‘I hope you will. My aunt knows nothing about London, and I know nothing of shopping; and she wants to buy the trousseau.’

‘That is certainly more my department than yours,’ answered Gretchen, ‘but you must not expect me to go without you.’

‘No. I have promised them to return as soon as possible. And, Gretchen, put on your blue muslin and the new bonnet.’

‘What! waste all that sweetness on Aunt Jane?’ exclaimed Gretchen, in amazement.

‘She evidently thinks I am such a dowdy,’ I said in explanation.

‘So that for the honour of the establishment——’ began Gretchen. ‘Well, if I must—I must.’ And she ran up to the first landing, where she paused to say, ‘By the by, Annie, you have just contrived to miss seeing an admirer of yours.’

Though my thoughts were full of Mr Sylvester, the word she employed threw them off that track, and I exclaimed—

‘Signor Dellaro? He was wonderfully gracious and complimentary last night.’

‘No; there has been a note from Dellaro, speaking of you in the tenderest manner—written evidently after supper, but that fact does not detract from the merits of the composition. Our early visitor was Miss Cleeves’ friend, Mr Sylvester. He came to leave his congratulations, or condolences, on your latest triumph. He seemed very much at a loss how to express his feelings, however. I fancy although he likes listening to singing, he considers singing in itself a sinful recreation. Still, he ac-

knowledged the reception you met with was marvellous. I suggested it was something like what Miss Cleeves desired to experience, and he instantly froze into an iceberg. After all, I think Miss Cleeves was right. For my part, I would as soon marry Sir Charles Grandison.'

'I suppose I ought to feel very much obliged to him,' I said; the consciousness of deceit lying like a crime at my heart.

'Of course you ought; though why, I have not the faintest idea. But I suppose it is a marvellous act of condescension for any one connected with the Wiffordes even to speak to an artiste. Of course it is all for love of Miss Cleeves. He knows she likes you, and thinks to please her by calling. But he would rather not have called—I could see that. When he found that papa was out and mamma invisible, he fled from the drawing-room. I can use no other word to express the precipitate manner in which he retired. Now I shall go and dress, and astonish Mrs Isaac Motfield with a vision of loveliness.'

Which she did.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LITTLE MUSIC.

No person need ever desire to see another more amazed than my aunt was at sight of Miss Gretchen Droigel. She was so surprised that for a few moments she actually lost fluency of utterance, whilst the girls remained dumb. By the time however they had closely scrutinized and mentally appraised Gretchen's attire, they felt consoled. After all, she only wore a muslin—ay, but such a muslin! only a silken scarf—but worn with such coquettish grace. Only a white aërophane bonnet, trimmed with a little lace, and ornamented by a blush rose, leaves, and bud—but oh! what a beautiful face it shaded. After all, they were as well dressed as she, in their own opinion; and when people

turned round in the street to stare at our party, as well they might, my cousins attributed these marks of respect to their own attractions ; whereas, it was only the discrepancy between Gretchen's appearance and theirs which rendered us all so conspicuous. Indeed, it was not long before Mrs Isaac took occasion to inform me—

‘ You are just as insignificant-looking as ever, Annie.’

‘ Yes, aunt,’ I replied, meekly ; but I did not add, that out in the London streets is about the last place in the world where a woman would wish to look significant. Oh ! that day—that weary, weary day—the horrors of which seem to lengthen themselves out once more as memory recalls their misery.

Gretchen was by instinct too genuinely a citizen of the world, she was by habit and training too thoroughly a Londoner, to feel as annoyances those things which were to my different nature, to my narrower experience, torture.

She thought nothing of our being expected to stand five in a row along the pavement, whilst Mrs Isaac and her daughters poured forth voluble inquiries concerning this building, or that statue (Mrs Isaac pronounced the latter word *statute*). She was willing to stop at every attractive shop-window for such a time that I momentarily dreaded a policeman asking us to move on. She remained languidly indifferent, whilst my aunt had half a shopful of goods brought down for her inspection, and then walked out after buying nothing ; remarking in a patronizing manner that she would perhaps call again. In one place, when this statement was made, I saw the man wink to his neighbour, who winked in return, and then coughed vigorously.

‘ I cannot endure this much longer, Gretchen,’ I said, when at length Jemima Jane, having seen a silk which she desired for her wedding-dress, her mother commenced a ‘ deal ’ for it, by offering the shopman one-half the price he asked. ‘ I feel ready to sink into the ground with shame.’

‘ If you can manage to sink into the ground, why not do so ?’ she inquired ; ‘ but as for the shame, it is nonsense. She is only doing what all country people do, and the shopkeepers look upon it as a matter of course. Besides, you and I are not chaffering.

Make yourself happy ; ' and she continued drawing a design upon the floor with her parasol, till Mrs Isaac appealed to her if she did not consider the silk very dear.

Then Gretchen arose—how I envied her imperturbable composure !—laid her hand, encased in a delicate-coloured glove, on the silk, examined its quality, its width, its peculiar shade.

' I think it reasonable in price,' she said, and the matter was settled. The silk was cut off, the account made out, the money paid, and when Mrs Isaac was outside the shop, Gretchen told that lady she had got a dead bargain.

I am now inclined to doubt the fact. Gretchen is an admirable manager, and dresses in the most exquisite manner on an allowance which, ample as it is, seems to me small for the results produced ; and yet whenever she writes to tell me she has seen some ' marvellous bargain,' I always hasten to reply I do not want anything of the kind, lest a parcel should appear by an early train.

Those silks, satins, furs, and laces which proved such bargains to Gretchen, never turned out cheap to me.

She was her father's daughter, though happily deficient in his culinary tastes. It is not necessary to do more than indicate the fact of their mutual resemblance in order to make the reader understand why I believe Mrs Isaac paid more for her daughter's wedding-dress than she might under different auspices.

We went from street to street, we entered shop after shop and our proceedings seemed to me a perpetual *Da Capo*. I had always hated *Da Capos* in music ; how much more did I hate them in the actions of human beings.

If a thoroughfare had to be crossed, the feat was always effected after an amount of deliberation, a number of falterings, and a succession of false starts, which sometimes, though unhappily not always, brought a policeman to the rescue.

The number of sixpences I expended that day on the Force, I regarded as an act of expiation for the dislike with which my kindred inspired me.

Fancy three of them making a dart at a crossing—or back-ing, one taking a flying leap to the opposite curbstone, one stand-

ing still among the objurgations of omnibus-drivers, the 'Now then, missus' of cabmen, the hidden jeers of street Arabs, who in tones of sympathy offered assistance, always indignantly refused. Imagine people who would not keep to their own side of the pavement, who, eternally in the way themselves, complained of 'pushing,' and got into wordy arguments, which I and Gretchen had to explain and apologize for. Conceive of all this on a broiling summer's day—but what folly I am writing !

Has not every person resident in London gone through the ordeal ? Why should its horrors be reproduced in detail ?

The culminating point, however, of my misery occurred in a pastrycook's shop, whither we all repaired to refresh our strength and injure our digestions. Ordinarily, Gretchen and I were rather given to spend money freely at such establishments, but on that special day I was so utterly exhausted with the heat, so tired with the clatter of my aunt's tongue, so ill with mortification and absolute fatigue, that the mere sight of the sticky cakes, the swarming flies, the jam tarts that looked as if they never could get cool, filled me with disgust.

From that hour to this I have never voluntarily entered a confectioner's.

'Now, Miss Droigel, what will you take ?' asked my aunt, who, though disagreeable, was not inhospitable.

'I ?' said Gretchen. 'An ice, thank you. Vanille,' she added, addressing herself to the young person behind the counter, who was by no means so marvellous a creation as the young person now to be beheld there.

'Well,' remarked Mrs Isaac, 'I'm hungry, so I should like something substantial. What have you, young woman ?' This to the predecessor in ringlets of the naughty young females that in enormous chignons now dispense refreshments to an ever-increasing population.

'Sausage rolls, beefsteak pies, pork pies,' responded the young woman, glibly.

'I'll try a pork pie,' said Mrs Isaac ; and, good heavens ! the thermometer stood at some infinite number of degrees in the shade. 'And now, what are you going to have, Annie ?'

‘Nothing, thank you,’ I answered.

‘Nothing! Nonsense, it won’t cost you anything. Of course I mean to pay for all.’

‘I cannot eat,’ I replied.

‘How absurd you are, Annie!’ said Gretchen. ‘Have an ice?’ But I shook my head.

‘Should you like a glass of water, Miss?’ asked the shop-woman, seeing, no doubt, that I looked weary.

‘Yes, and have some jelly,’ Gretchen suggested.

‘No jelly, thank you,’ I interposed.

‘Mercy upon us, child, what do you live on?’ asked my aunt. ‘Is there nothing you like?’

‘She likes me,’ replied Gretchen.

‘I am certain no one could help liking you,’ said Mrs Isaac, with wonderful heartiness.

By this time we were all served according to our several fancies. Seated beside a small round table, my aunt—shawl unfastened, bonnet strings economically untied and flung back over her shoulders, gloves off, and rolled up into a little tidy ball—ate her pie, whilst her two daughters, determined to follow Gretchen’s lead without Gretchen’s experience, gave themselves toothache by putting great spoonfuls of strawberry and raspberry ice into their mouths, and swallowing the same, with much trouble to themselves and pain to the beholders.

My chair chanced to be placed so that I faced the wall, where I could catch a reflection of our party, and persons who passed up and down the shop in a glass, with which it was possible for me to see sideways.

Those of us who were not pale with the heat, were red—a rich full-blown crimson; and the young ladies, my cousins, were making themselves redder by swallowing those wretched ices, in the same manner as a small quantity of water only serves to increase the intensity of flame issuing from a burning house.

Further they had a plate of sponge cakes, to which they paid devoted court, and with the contents whereof they were crumbing themselves all over. From them I stole a look at Gretchen, cool, self-possessed—a little paler than usual, but otherwise un-

changed mentally or physically. My relations did not put her out. Why should they, not being hers? The weather did not affect Gretchen. She neither turned blue in winter nor red in summer. Happy Gretchen! Happy, thrice happy at that moment, in not being me!

For after pausing to pay the young person who presided a little higher up the shop, a gentleman walked slowly out, raising his hat to Gretchen as he passed.

His glance took in our group. I could see that in the mirror. I knew who it was, but I did not turn my head.

‘Who is that gentleman?’ asked my aunt, in a hurried whisper, before the door closed behind him.

‘An acquaintance of papa’s,’ said Gretchen, calmly. Oh, Gretchen! how I blessed you for those four words.

‘His face seems to me familiar,’ remarked Mrs Isaac. ‘I must have seen him, or some one the living image of him, at some time.’

‘Possibly you have seen him,’ suggested Gretchen. ‘He goes about a great deal, and visits at a number of country houses.’

‘La, ma! he’s the very moral of Mr Sylvester, that used to come to Fairport with the Miss Wiffordes,’ said Jemima Jane, her accuracy of language being as remarkable as was her mother’s.

‘His name is Birwood, I think,’ said Gretchen, unmoved. ‘But papa does not know much of him.’

‘Oh!’ commented Mrs Isaac. ‘He is certainly uncommon like Mr Sylvester.’

‘I fancy everybody is like somebody else,’ observed Miss Drogel, without a change of countenance. ‘If your friend resembles Mr Birwood, he resembles an extremely unpleasant person.’

‘Mr Sylvester is no friend of ours,’ interposed my aunt, eagerly. ‘He is a high and mighty gentleman, he is—some sort of relation to those ladies who drove my poor husband’s mother away from her home, and all belonging to her, in her old age. I have never set eyes on him except riding along the parade, or driving with the Miss Wiffordes.’

‘Those are the dames of high degree you stood in such awe of, Annie, are they not?’ said Gretchen.

‘Well she might,’ exclaimed Mrs Isaac. ‘I dare say Annie has many a sad thought, even now, of all the trouble she brought to her poor old grandmother, who fairly worshipped the ground she walked on. She set up for herself an idol, and she reaped her reward. Ah!’ And my aunt shook her head as if she was reading a tract, every word of which applied with twenty-horse power to the past or present or future state of some sinner—not herself.

‘From all I have heard, I should say so,’ remarked Gretchen. ‘Mrs Motfield deserved love, devotion, consideration, and she received all three.’

‘Well, well, we won’t talk about that any more,’ said Mrs Isaac.

‘I think it will be better not,’ agreed Gretchen; and I noticed from this time a decrease in my aunt’s cordiality of manner towards Miss Droigel, which change Gretchen accepted with her accustomed equanimity.

While my aunt was settling for her provisions, which she did after the usual amount of grumbling and bargaining, with which I was growing familiar, and her daughters were settling their bonnets and composing their faces before the mirror, I took occasion to whisper to Gretchen—

‘Why did you not say it was Mr Sylvester Birwood?’

‘Should you have wished me to say anything of the kind?’ retorted Gretchen; and as she spoke I felt as though I were passing through a fire. My cheeks had colour enough in them when Jemima Jane turned from the glass.

‘Gracious, Annie, do you carry rouge about with you?’ she inquired. ‘You were white as a lily a minute ago, and now you look like a rose.’

The circumstance of being engaged lent an occasional semblance of poetry to Miss Motfield’s remarks.

‘Miss Trenet carries her rouge in a casket whence you will never be able to produce any,’ said Gretchen, heartily.

Perfectly well Jemima understood a sneer lay hidden away in this sentence, but she declined to search for it.

‘I suppose you say that because she is a singer,’ was the way in which she parried the blow.

‘Perhaps, and for other reasons too numerous to explain.’

‘Living in London makes people very clever, I think,’ remarked Jemima.

‘Do you think it has made your cousin clever?’ asked Gretchen.

Jemima looked at me dubiously. ‘You must not try to be civil at the expense of candour,’ I said, coming to her rescue. ‘No one ever thought me clever, and no one ever will.’

‘If we are to see Westminster Abbey, we have no time to lose,’ cried my aunt at this juncture.

Oh these country people! let them be old or young, weak or strong, men or women, they have when in London but one dominant idea—to see as much and to enjoy as little as possible.

Had we not done enough and seen enough for one day? Well, well, we went to the Abbey, and saw as much of it as we could before afternoon service, to which we stayed, and which Mrs Isaac considered a ‘poor affair.’

After that we had a turn round the Houses of Parliament, made a détour into St James’s Park, saw Buckingham Palace and the Duke of York’s statue, and made our way along Pall Mall to St Martin’s Lane, where we took omnibus for home.

‘I wish these people had not come; I wish they were gone,’ said Gretchen, as she turned to me, sitting utterly weary and worn on the side of her bed. I had given up my room to the use of Mrs Isaac and her daughters, and thus it chanced Gretchen and I were arraying ourselves for the family tea in company.

‘That woman does not like you; she will do harm if she can.’

‘She cannot do me any harm,’ I replied.

‘We shall see,’ remarked Gretchen. ‘I think I foresee.’

‘What do you foresee?’ I asked.

‘Sufficient for the day,’ she answered. ‘I fancy this day has been more than sufficient for you.’

‘My head is aching, and I am tired to death.’

‘Precisely what papa expected. He said to me, “Annie shall go and wear herself out the first day, after which I must interpose my authority.”’

‘I wish he had interposed it to-day,’ I remarked.

‘And been compelled to go on interposing. No—I admire papa’s tactics on this occasion. He wanted to free you at one blow, and you shall see how splendidly he will do it.’

As she spoke I thought of what had passed between me and Mr Sylvester concerning the Professor; and half in weariness, half in fright, I uttered a deep sigh, and hid my face in the pillow.

Gretchen crossed the room, her hair streaming down her back, and laid her hand on my shoulder.

‘You must not give up in that manner, young lady,’ she said. ‘Make an effort for this evening, and you shall be free hereafter, I promise you, little woman;’ and she kissed my cheek with new tenderness which seemed lately to have been born in her. ‘Shall I get some eau de Cologne and bathe your forehead?’

‘No, thank you—oh no!’ I answered, struggling to a standing position. ‘I shall be dressed as soon as you, Gretchen.’

‘I do not imagine you will,’ she replied; ‘but that makes no difference—I will go down and try to render myself agreeable to your charming aunt.’

‘She is not charming at all,’ I said.

‘No doubt some one thinks or thought her so,’ was the calm remark; ‘I cannot say I do myself—on the contrary rather.’

It was not necessary to pursue the subject, so I allowed it to drop, and Gretchen and I proceeded to make our toilettes in silence. Before we had completed them, however, we heard Herr Droigel’s voice marvelling if his ‘vain children’ meant to descend or not.

‘I am coming,’ cried Gretchen, adding as she ran down-stairs, ‘as for Annie, she wanted to go to bed and never get up again. Her head is—as you might have anticipated.’

‘Ah ! ah ! ah ! ah !’ moaned the Professor. ‘My Annie beloved ; what a slight, slender scabbard holds the sword of her genius ! I was wrong : we must no more of this—no more.’

After which by-play between father and daughter, each word in which was heard by Mrs Isaac and my uncle, Droigel entered his drawing-room and the door was shut.

When I joined the party, all eyes turned on me—some curiously, some anxiously.

‘Come near to me, pale-face,’ cried Herr Droigel, rising and offering me an easy-chair close to his elbow, ‘I want to look at you ; I want to know how you repay me for granting a whole nine hours of holiday. Ah ! ah ! cheeks white, eyes heavy, limbs weary, hands nerveless—no, no, Miss Annie, holiday-making is very well, but health is better, and if you cannot maintain health you must not make holiday.’

At which speech Jemima Jane laughed, and Mrs Isaac looked disgusted.

‘It seems like new light through old windows to hear of Annie being delicate,’ she observed.

‘I think she gives way a little sometimes,’ added Madame, which speech so utterly astounded me that I dropped a flower I was holding, and looked at Herr Droigel’s wife in blank amazement.

‘And I think we had better have some tea,’ said the Professor. ‘Here, you dear sir, you good uncle, take charge of your niece. She is like one of those flimsy papers of Threadneedle Street : she is of not much bulk, but she is of value.’

‘As that dreadful man from the City whom Dellaro introduced the other evening said, “There are notes and notes—bankers and bankers,”’ I observed, trying to make myself agreeable.

‘When I was young,’ remarked Mrs Isaac, in a tone intended to imply everything had been right at that period of the world’s history, ‘we were taught at school it was the height of rudeness to speak of people by their surnames.’

‘Perhaps, aunt, you had not so many people to talk of in those days as Herr Droigel and I have now,’ was my reply. We

are told a worm will turn. It seemed to me at the moment I had endured a considerable amount of trampling from my aunt, and the sooner I began to turn the better.

After tea we relapsed into that state of apathetic dulness, of respectable stupidity, from which the meal had roused us.

Tea is no doubt a comfortable and invigorating beverage, but it has no power to obtain fire from flint, to strike conversational sparks from stones.

Very different was our talk from that of the happy evening before. We were as oil and water, our ideas would not mix and mingle.

Herr Droigel and my uncle and Gretchen and I did our best, but the spirits of the party seemed to lie under a cloud. Mrs Isaac was cross. As she would herself have said, 'We were not of her sort,' a grievous sin in her estimation. We were not rich enough or grand enough to impress her; we were not sufficiently poor and humble to be patronized. Even Gretchen, of whose dress, manners, deportment, and general appearance she had in the earlier part of the day conceived a favourable opinion, had, by some means, 'got out of her good books.' True, she praised everything about the girl to Madame—everything, from her plaits to her sandals, but that was only done the better to depreciate me. It is not enough to state a person to be positively contemptible: the effect of detraction is always increased by erecting a visible standard of excellence in comparison to which he is shown to be relatively contemptible as well; and for some reason best known to herself—not attributable to modesty, I am certain—Mrs Isaac refrained from measuring me with my cousins.

As for the girls, the absence of 'beaux'—as Jemima comprehensively styled all eligible men—had the effect of reducing them to absolute silence. Whilst parading about the streets they seemed to me gifted with a very Niagara of words. They talked loud and long, they uttered remarks for the benefit of the passers-by. They giggled and laughed till even their mother was occasionally roused to remind them 'They were not in Fairport;' but now a spirit of dumbness seemed to have taken possession of them.

They looked at illustrated books, and stared wearily out of window, answering Gretchen in monosyllables, and scarcely brightening up under the influence of Herr Droigel's outrageous compliments.

After we had sat thus for a little while, my uncle went away to call upon some one who was not to be seen except after seven o'clock, and, relieved of his scrutiny, the two girls began to whisper together, break-out at intervals into smothered giggles, when the confidences exchanged grew specially amusing.

'Bad, bad! not well-bred,' was Herr Droigel's commentary on them after our visitors were gone; whereupon Madame answered, 'I see it not; girls will be girls. It is not fit they should always conduct their manners like women grown up.'

From which remark I inferred Madame thought that some one conducted her manners improperly.

Could it be me? I was growing uneasy at an undefined change in her mode of speaking of and to me. For years she had been, if not a good mother to 'her Annie,' at least as good as it was in her power to be to any one.

She never made me feel that in her affections I stood second to Gretchen—never allowed me to see I was less dear to her than her own child—never until that unlucky occasion when I expressed my opinions concerning Mrs Isaac.

What was there—what could there be so admirable and so super-excellent about that woman, to render one guilty of high treason if one disliked her?

'She is detestable.' I said those words to myself as I looked at her talking to Madame.

The judgment of my childhood remained unchanged after the lapse of all those years; and her judgment of me remained unchanged also—I could feel it.

I knew she hated me for my success—just as she would have hated me for failure—had I failed. She grudged me the friends sent to me by Heaven—the reputation already achieved—the power of making money; she hated me for being, as I had said long before concerning Mrs Daniel. In the scheme of creation I was in her opinion a supernumerary, and a pernicious super to

boot. If I had been ragged, and begging my bread, I do not think she would have pitied me ; if I had been a Duchess, she would have thought and said the position had been obtained by cunning and deceit.

So long as I was living, I could do nothing right in her eyes —even if I died, I felt certain I should die in some manner objectionable to my aunt—and thus my thoughts ran on till interrupted by Mrs Isaac suddenly inquiring—

‘Annie, are you not going to give us a song?’

Now this was one of the things I had determined I would not do. If she liked to take tickets for any concert at which I was to appear, and see me well dressed, and amongst other artistes, well and good ; she might hear my ‘wild notes’ to her heart’s content or discontent ; but sing to that woman and her girls in our drawing-room, in cold blood, I felt to be an impossibility.

‘You must excuse me,’ I therefore answered, ‘I cannot sing to-night.’

‘Oh, that’s all nonsense ; you are not a child now, pretending to be shy ; you are grown up and as tall as you ever will be, and singing is your business.’

‘Only when I am paid for it,’ I said, laughing to conceal my irritation. ‘Seriously, aunt, I should be most happy to do what you ask, but the fact is, I cannot sing without the gaslights and the clapping.’

‘Well, I’m sure !’ ejaculated Mrs Isaac.

‘Admirable !’ cried Herr Droigel. He always accented the *mi* syllable, and so gave this word quite the effect of an exclamation.

‘Admirable ! You learn, child.’

‘The remark is not original,’ I said, demurely, ‘I have only adapted it.’

‘A timely adaptation is almost as useful and quite as amusing as an original remark,’ Gretchen observed.

‘But are you serious in saying you will not sing for me ? asked Mrs Isaac.

For “will not,” read “cannot,” I replied. ‘It is a fact

that if I were to try and sing now, I should probably not be able to get out a note.'

'Well, yours must be a strange sort of voice,' remarked my aunt. 'Now, there are my girls—of course, I don't mean to say either of them is as clever as you (this was sarcastic), or has had the advantages showered upon you (this was envious), but I'll be bound you would never hear any excuse like that you have just made come out of their lips. They have been taught, poors dears ! to make the most of their small abilities, and I call that better and more Christian-like than to have great abilities and not to be able to use them half time—you remember the parable of the talents ?'

'It is one frequently quoted—so frequently that one is in no danger of forgetting it,' I replied. As my aunt observed subsequently to Gretchen, 'the loss of her voice does not seem to have affected her tongue.' 'Jemima,' I added, 'will you be Christian-like, and sing something for us ?'

Jemima hesitated.

'Come, come, don't you be turning shy, Miss !' exclaimed Mrs Isaac, in high delight at the prospect of hearing one of her young screech-owls hoot. 'Hold up your head, and let Herr Droigel see what you can do. She wants no notes, thank you, Annie. My girls,' she said, turning to the Professor, 'can sing anything if they hear it once.'

'What a marvellous faculty !' exclaimed my master.

'And they can learn a tune as easily by hearing it as anybody else can learn it from the music,' pursued Mrs Isaac, warming with her subject; 'but that they get from me.'

'Ah, how good, how fine !' exclaimed Herr Droigel. 'Whenever we meet genius, we must go back to first causes—the mother, it is she, it is from her——'

'I don't believe now Mr Motfield could turn a tune if it was to save his life,' continued Mrs Isaac, encouraged by the Professor's interest and admiration.

'Yes, yes; but is it not that as I say just now ? It is the mother—it is——'

But at this point the conversation was interrupted by Jemina,

Jane. Spite of her mother's statement, she seemed to prefer having music before her, and had selected a song, then not long published, which by reason of its extensive popularity soon found its way even to remote towns. The same words have, I think, been set to two if not more airs, but Jemima's interpretation stamped that special composition into my memory.

I offered to accompany her, but my aunt promptly negatived that suggestion, evidently thinking I might cause her daughter to break down. Clearly there was no wickedness of which she did not secretly consider me capable.

Miss Motfield began. She may have been able to play correctly without notes, but she could certainly not play correctly with them.

Tum-ti-tum-ti, tum-ti-tum-ti, Tra la la, La la la la. Thus the symphony, and certainly every third note she played in the bass was wrong. I saw Droigel pull one agonized grimace, and then compose his features.

After clearing her throat with a little suggestion of a cough, half apologetic, half assertive, she uplifted her voice: —

‘Meek and low-lee—pure and ho-lee.’

(The lee falling on a high note.)

‘Chief’—this word with great emphasis and decision; ‘among’—slurred, as being of no particular account; ‘the blessed three’—*staccato* and *rallentando*.

‘Moving sad-ness’—sadness completely dissevered, so as to enable the singer to deliver ‘ness’ to us with all the force of her lungs—‘into glad-ness’—‘ness’ again particularly prominent.

‘Heavenborn art thou—Cha-ri-tee.’

To describe the shock the first line gave me would be simply impossible. During the whole of my residence in London I had been with people who either sang not at all or who sang fairly well. The little family gatherings which till lately constituted our wildest dissipation, were attended principally by Droigel’s compatriots, and although I never took kindly ~~either~~ to the German language or to the German style of singing, still

the music was exquisite, the time admirably kept, the harmony perfect.

Of that fearful and horrible thing inflicted upon a number of suffering guests by young ladies and middle-aged ladies, who say with a sweetly conscious smile and simper, intended to be modest and attractive, that they 'sing a little,' I had no experience. When I left school, I left behind me also the feeble wailings of British incompetency, and therefore while I expected to find Jemima's performance bad, I was utterly unprepared for the depths of musical, or rather non-musical, depravity which she sounded.

I looked at Herr Droigel—Herr Droigel looked at me; then we averted our eyes and kept them studiously out of range, while Jemima, serenely confident in her own strength, continued her song.

Where she got to whilst informing us

‘Pity dwelleth in thy bosom,
Kindness reigneth in thy heart,’

I have literally no idea; but she began to right herself at the picture of 'Gentle thoughts alone can,' and came safely to land on 'sway-hay thee,' which was more than I expected, and triumphantly delivered herself of

‘Judgment hath in thee no-ho part.’

After that it was plain sailing for one line,

‘Meek and low-lee, pure and ho-lee’

being repeated, and the whole ending with a defiant flourish on the words—

‘Turning sadness into gladness,
Heaven-born art thou, Char-i-tee;’

succeeded by a symphony consisting of a series of short runs laboriously executed that pulled up at intervals with tum-tum, and then recommenced for all the world like a baby trying to walk; after which Miss Motfield commenced the second verse—and—finished it.

I do not know exactly what I said when all aglow with the

consciousness of having executed a difficult task perfectly, and slightly out of breath with her exertions, Jemima rose from the music stool and left the astonished piano to recover its senses. I know I must have uttered some fib, and managed to speak it like truth, for both the performer and her mother looked delighted.

Involuntarily Herr Droigel uttered something like a paraphrase of that famous speech made by a bishop, who by it saved a routed audience from utter confusion—

‘The next time, Miss ——, you say you cannot sing—well, we shall know how to believe you——’ But before Jemima left the instrument he had recovered himself—

‘It is marvellous—wonderful,’ he said, rubbing his great hands together as if in an ecstasy. ‘Thank you, Miss Jemima—so much. Has the other sister, Madame—your second charming daughter—a talent similar?’

Mrs Isaac did not know—she believed—that was she had been told—friends kindly said—but then friends might be prejudiced—that a musical strain ran through all her children.

‘You should hear Tommy sing the “British Grenadiers,”’ she added, addressing me.

I said I should like very much to hear that inspiriting song sung by Tommy, and Herr Droigel hoped we might some day have that pleasure. It may be mentioned here that we had.

Meanwhile Jemima’s sister was waiting in a fever of anxiety to be asked to emulate the doings of the last performer, and noticing this, Gretchen good-naturedly led her to the piano.

‘Do you prefer to accompany yourself?’ I asked, notwithstanding my previous rebuff.

‘Yes, thank you,’ she replied; ‘I always play my own accompaniments?’ which was satisfactory, as no blame could in that case be attributed to me.

Without the slightest prelude she commenced, played a false note—another, and yet another. Crimson with mortification, she uttered an impatient ‘Ah!’ and tried back, making this time a fair start.

‘One moment, please,’ cried Herr Droigel ; ‘ten thousand—ten million pardons, dear Miss—but what is dat?’

“Adelaïde,” I replied, seeing that my cousin had not the faintest conception of what it might be he wanted to know.

‘Ah ! not that song,’ he exclaimed ; ‘no, no, not dat. The fact is,’ he went on, turning towards Mrs Isaac, ‘I cannot bear the painful thoughts it recalls. I have bitter memories—heart-breaking—connected therewith. It wrings my soul, even that one bar. Dear, dear Miss, forgive, and favour us with something as charming but possessed of no recollections. Ah ! happy, happy spring time,’ he continued, looking at the two girls, ‘that has no past—which is all present and future. You forgive, dear Madame, you who perhaps can out of the depths of your own experience understand my feelings a little ;’ and he stretched out his hand to Mrs Isaac, who took it and would have been mightily puzzled what to do with it afterwards had not the Professor after a tender pressure withdrawn his fingers.

The young lady, who was ambitious, substituted Schubert for Beethoven, and favoured us with *Der Wanderer* in English. It did not matter in the least. If we were to have it at all, the language could make no difference. She had a better voice and played more correctly than Jemima, but with all—ye gods !

When the evening was over and our visitors were gone, Herr Droigel came to me.

‘Sing, Annie, sing, for the love of Heaven—take that taste out of mine mouth—those sounds out of mine ears. Ach, mein Gott ! what has thy Droigel done—what sin has he committed that he should be so tortured ?’

What Herr Droigel’s god may have answered I know not ; certain it is, however, the Professor was soon restored to his accustomed equanimity.

As I have said, he had a special idol of his own whom he chose to address as a deity, but which was to me a perfectly unknown god.

Perhaps it was a goddess, and her name Self-Interest.

I forgot to mention that whilst that little interlude concerning ‘Adelaïde’ was in progress, Gretchen left the room.

‘ I thought I should have gone into hysterics,’ she said to me subsequently.

So far as I was concerned, I wonder I did not.

Said Madame before we retired to rest—

‘ Dey did deir best.’

‘ Mine Gott !’ remarked her husband, once again addressing his personal deity, ‘ if dat be deir best, vy do dey do at all ?’

In my opinion a most pertinent question.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PREVISION.

AFTER that evening I saw little more of my aunt or cousins during their stay in London, greatly to Gretchen’s and my contentment, and to the maintenance of peaceful relations between me and my kindred.

On any more expeditions, whether with a view to business or amusement, Herr Droigel set his veto.

‘ It vexed his very soul,’ so he expressed himself to Mrs Isaac, ‘ to have to assume a character despotic, not to say brutal, but he knew that bad health meant bad voice, that fatigue meant bad health. No, he must interdict ; Annie had still some more songs to sing in London—not many, fortunately, but enough—and after that she had to make her little tours. Would—could dear Madame Motfield ever forgive the savage nature poor Droigel was forced to exhibit ?’

To which dear Madame Motfield replied, with a charming candour, that she not only forgave, but pitied. For her part, she thought he was a very kind gentleman, but sorely put upon ; and further, she felt, as usual, very thankful to the Almighty it was no child of hers—no one, indeed, who could be called a blood-relation to her—who gave way to airs and graces, and made herself a trouble to everybody she had anything to do with.

Which speech Herr Droigel acknowledged with a bow and

smile of such complete innocence that it left my aunt in doubt whether he grasped her meaning.

'Of course a foreigner cannot be expected to understand like an English person,' she remarked to her daughters, in a tone of self-conscious superiority. But Herr Droigel understood well enough.

'She would have liked thee to be her drudge, is it not so, Annie?' he asked; to which I answered—

'I think not. She would have liked me in no capacity.'

'Never mind; thy way lies different,' he said, to comfort me, as though I stood in need of comfort.

'We certainly could not travel the same road long in company,' I remarked, and then the matter dropped. Mrs Isaac was not a tempting subject on which to enlarge.

Within a day or two Jemima's *futur* appeared on the stage, and then there was much lamentation over the purchases which had been made so precipitately. The young man came up to town armed with letters of introduction to heads of departments in City wholesale houses, and Mrs Isaac's opinion was that he could have bought the wedding-dress for one-half the money—just one-half.

Being subsequently favoured with a private view of some of the articles obtained per favour of Mr So-and-so, I am, however, inclined to think my aunt was slightly deceived in the City as well as at the West End, and that Jemima could have provided her trousseau at dear old Mrs Nelson's, better and cheaper than she did in London. For one mercy I was thankful, however—we had not to go into the City with them. Herr Droigel refused his consent, as has been stated, whilst Gretchen flatly declined to make herself a party to such an excursion.

The labour those people went through! They issued forth at unheard-of hours. They did the Tower, Greenwich Hospital, and St Paul's in a forenoon. They would stay out all day in a blazing sun, and then finish up at the theatre at night.

We did our best: we sent them tickets, got them orders, and made them presents—at least we made presents to Jemima Jane. Gretchen gave her a very pretty inlaid writing-desk, Madame a

card-case, I a brooch which for gorgeousness of setting and brilliancy of colour might have delighted the heart even of Mrs Daniel Motfield ; whilst Herr Droigel presented her with a Church Service bound in velvet, the form of Solemnization of Matrimony in which he with ponderous jocularity recommended her to commence studying immediately. Whereupon the intended bridegroom remarked he believed she knew it off by heart already, for which pleasantry he was rewarded by a playful slap from his fiancée, and then the pair expressed a hope that when they were married and settled we would all come down and spend a few weeks with them.

‘Of course Fairport is very different from London,’ added Mrs Isaac ; ‘but it is considered healthy, and the gentry come from far and near to stay there for the benefit of the sea-bathing. We will all do our best to make you comfortable. We may not be fine folks, but we are true ;’ which statement Herr Droigel received with appropriate comments, and having assured the dear lady of his devotion to her and respect for her husband and admiration for her two young lady daughters, we took our leave, the Professor hoping and trusting we might all soon have the felicity of renewing an acquaintance so charming.

The reason for these adieux, which were exchanged somewhat unexpectedly, was a sudden arrangement that the party we were to travel with should start from London at an earlier date than that at first mentioned, in order to sing at three towns not originally included in our programme.

To me the news was inexpressibly agreeable. Each morning when I awoke the idea of the same town holding me and Mrs Isaac spread itself over my mind like a cloud. I could not sing so well because, even although I knew how and where she was passing the evening, I had a nervous dread of her being one of the audience. The pleasure of seeing my uncle was damped because it was necessary to see her also. Since the period when her intended arrival was first announced, we of the Droigel household seemed to be at sixes and sevens. Gretchen conducted herself like one who had something serious on her mind, Madame was by turns distant and snappish, Herr Droigel walked

much up and down the rooms, opening and shutting windows, whistling at intervals, and humming softly to himself.

The weather was, as I have already said, intensely warm, and that made us, I fancy, a little irritable. The prospect of getting away into the country for a short time seemed delightful—that of bidding farewell to Mrs Isaac more charming still.

When Gretchen one day announced the tidings she had just heard, I was about to execute a *pas seul* in order faintly to express my pleasure, when she stopped my ecstasies.

‘Take it as quietly as you can,’ she said. ‘Make believe you are not very glad—that you do not care greatly about the matter.’

‘Why?’ I asked.

‘Never mind why. Do as I advise you, like a wise girl.’

I stood silent for a moment, then I said—

‘Gretchen, why is it we all seem so different now to what we were three months ago?’

‘A difficulty has arisen,’ she answered. ‘I hope we shall have got over it before you return.’

‘Is it—has it anything to do with money?’ I inquired. She had talked so much to me one time and another concerning pecuniary difficulties, that I thought perhaps she was referring to some financial embarrassment.

‘No, it is not money,’ she replied. ‘It is—in a word, Annie, I don’t want to tell you what it is; and perhaps I am wrong in my own notion altogether.’

Had she heard—did they suspect anything of my conversation with Mr Sylvester? As his words recurred to my mind, I felt my cheeks growing red, whilst I stammered out—

‘Have—have—I done anything?’

She looked at me curiously for a moment then broke out laughing :

‘No, Annie, you have done nothing—nothing at all events to make your complexion so brilliant in a moment. Now put the whole affair on one side, and prepare to enjoy your trip. How I envy you! These tours must be the pleasantest part of a singer’s life.’

When the morning on which we were to start came, I felt inclined to echo with all my heart Gretchen's sentiments. Such a delightful noise and excitement pervaded the house. Our luggage was ready in the hall ; at the door stood three cabs ; in the drawing-room all languages known at the Tower of Babel were being uttered at once. A slight breeze stirred the curtains ; overhead the sky was blue, and the sun shining through the freshly-watered streets ; trucks filled with bright flowers yielding an exquisite fragrance, were being wheeled through the streets.

'How I wish you were coming with us !' I said to Gretchen.

'So do I, but wishes will neither saddle nor shoe the mare,' she answered.

'Now,' exclaimed the Hungarian lady formerly mentioned, who had already taken upon herself the leadership of our party, 'there is no time to lose, Madame Droigel ; you know you may safely trust your husband to my keeping, and the child--no harm shall happen to her. Droigel, take leave of your wife. Annie, you come with me. Good-bye, Gretchen.' Then kiss--kiss--it seemed as if we were all kissing each other at once. A minute more and we were waving our handkerchiefs in answer to other handkerchiefs waving from the windows, till turning round a corner waving was no longer possible or expedient.

'How happy you look,' said Madame Szeredy, addressing me. 'You will not wear so pleasant an expression a month hence, when you find how we all can quarrel and how I can scold.'

It is not my purpose to give any detailed account of that tour, which, spite of daily bickerings and a perpetual war of differing opinions, seemed to me then, and seems to me now, to have been one long bright holiday. Charming and fresh as everything appeared to my imagining, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to give an idea either of its charm or freshness to the reader. The world was young for me then ; I had no responsibility or anxiety. If I did my part well, I was patted and petted ; if I did it ill, the reproaches poured upon me neither broke my bones nor hurt my heart.

One hour I heard I was a creature too wicked, too debased, for Madame Szeredy to be able to find words adequate to express

my vileness ; the next I was a dear good girl whom it was a pleasure to instruct, who set an example of conscientious study to persons old enough to know better.

After all, there can be no question but that maledictions uttered in a foreign tongue have a piquancy and assume a degree of harmlessness impossible if spoken in one's own. I do not think I should have liked to be called a beast, a fool, a fiend, a brute, a demon, an impostor, a devil, in English, and yet it never disturbed my equanimity to hear those expressions hurled at me in French, German, or Italian.

When, however, any mishap occurred in which several persons were implicated, and mutual recriminations began, I used to put my fingers in my ears and sit in that attitude till the hurricane should have subsided.

No scolding in any opera I have ever heard approached the absolute sublimity perpetually attained by our party. They all screamed out at once ; they declaimed, they gesticulated, they shrieked forth invectives, they shouted anathemas, they thrust clenched fists into each other's faces ; they stormed, and, looking like fiends, would fling disdainful glances over their shoulders at a vanquished foe.

Then almost in a moment the tempest lulled, and half-an-hour afterwards they would be laughing round the supper or breakfast table as though there were no such thing in this world as difference of opinion, with its concomitants, anger and rage and all uncharitableness.

Looking back, I must say there is something marvellous to me in the apparent innocence, in the thorough light-heartedness, of the party in which I am now aware I was the only person ignorant of the world's wickedness, its pitfalls, its vice, its misery. Not a woman among those who seemed never to have existed for or thought about anything except their art and amusement, but had a story in her life—a story no one would desire to hear or tell ; whilst the experience of the men must have out-Heroded theirs ; and yet I declare, wide as has been my acquaintance with artistes, I have heard no word pass their lips at which Virtue need to hold up its hands in horrified surprise ; I have listened

to nothing calculated to offend the taste or jar against morality.

I know now what the morality was of those with whom I travelled. I understand the pitiful story of sin and sorrow each could have recalled, or was enacting ; and yet no children out for a holiday could have been more innocent in their ways, their talk, their doings.

School-boy tricks were rewarded by peals of laughter, practical jokes which at ten years of age I should have considered beneath my dignity were performed at the expense of each and all. I cannot wonder at staid English landlords and landladies being scandalized at our frivolity, and talking disparagingly about ‘them furriners.’ Sometimes for the honour of our art I wished we could have adopted manners and a style of life more quiet and conventional, and ventured one day to bring out this notion for Herr Droigel’s contemplation.

‘Yes—yes,’ he answered. ‘Good—very good ; but then my Annie must remember respectability means stupidity, dulness, stagnation. We might get good voices out of those materials, but good singing never. Why, you already sing quite differently to that which was your manner when you saw no life but that of poor Droigel’s home circle, when you heard nothing but humdrum, when your food was child’s food, and your experience less than that of any school-girl. The artiste nature lives but in the sunbeams of excitement—it withers, it dies in the shade of a semi-stagnant existence.

What he said was true, and at that moment, spite of my timid scruples, the life on which I had elected to enter seemed very fair.

It appeared to my fancy like a broad smooth river, fringed with flowers, whereon were gaily-painted pleasure barges filled with laughing, light-hearted passengers. Music floated over the waters, sweet sounds rose and fell, the voices of singing men and singing women keeping time and tune to the melody of the dipping oars.

Out of some of those old story books at Lovedale I had gathered this allegory doubtless, but it came to me then with all the charm of novelty.

This was what I had been longing for all my life ; there lay the happy river, already I saw the place reserved for me—a place of honour. I could make more than a success, leave something behind me more than the memory of a song that is sung. I had it in me to achieve Fame. I knew it, I felt it, and yet at the very moment I was longing to set sail, an indefinable misgiving seemed to keep me tarrying on the brink.

The latter part of that dim old story held most probably a moral, for there came to me a vision of a sea beyond the river, of dark stormy waves, a murky sky, boats riven asunder, men striving, women shrieking. My sleep became uneasy, and I dreamt of that scene more than once. Sometimes I was gliding along easily, quietly, the cool water laving my hand, which hung over the gunwale of the boat ; but however my voyage began, it always ended in confusion and anguish. I clutched ropes attached to nothing, which came away in my fingers ; I held on to oars that slipped out of my feeble grasp ; I tried to cry aloud, but my voice fell back into my heart in a dead silence. In the distance I beheld my grandmother, and strove to reach her, but the more I tried the more the raging billows bore me from her.

I used to wake trembling and afraid, but the bright light of the summer morning restored my courage, and with the sun shining into my room, I have had the sweetest, most refreshing sleep—sleep which gave me new life and energy.

Fact was I had no leisure through the day to remember my dreams, and at night I was too tired to fear them. We worked hard, all of us : we had to rehearse with the members of provincial societies ; the local musicians had to be drilled, and denounced, and encouraged.

Our greatest trials were with amateurs.

‘Accursed be the people who, knowing not how to play or sing, will persist in playing and singing,’ said Madame Szeredy, only she did not say it in English. ‘Oh ! what a country is this, where, though they have eaten of the fruit, they cannot yet discern good from evil.’

‘They think evil—good,’ explained Herr Droigel. ‘They understand not art ; they distrust it.’

‘Strangers are generally distrusted,’ said Madame Szeredy, ‘and no greater stranger, in English eyes, could land herself on Albion’s shores than Art.’

‘That is right,’ exclaimed Herr Droigel. ‘I was once at a concert when Serlini sung. I had a ticket for the best place sent me by her, and I sat amongst a number of people the most respectable, of the most fashion. Well, the singing of all was divine, and yet the audience near me seemed cold until—would you believe it?—that once famous Mrs Edmonds, that once British favourite, now in heaven—that cow—that iceberg—that woman with the big eyes and a mouth which opened as a grave, came forward, when she was greeted—ah! yes, she had a reception if you like. Said a comfortable madame, who had, mistaking me for somebody with a position, done me so great honour as to borrow my glass, “Now we shall hear something pleasant. Give me singing like Mrs Edmonds’. She is a good wife and mother, I am sure; very different from those foreign women.”’

‘Madame,’ I made reply, ‘could you not see plenty of good wives and mothers without paying half-a-guinea for the pleasure?’

‘Ah! yes,’ she said; ‘but it makes one feel so much safer when one knows that the private character of a singer is beyond suspicion.’

‘Mein Gott!’ I exclaimed; ‘it makes not me feel safe. I know Mrs Edmonds will murder that poor innocent song—slay it as Herod did the children. Better would it be if she stayed at home with her babies. Wherefore my fine lady returned my glass, and turned her back on me.’

‘Did she imagine then,’ I asked, ‘that Madame Serlini, because she sings so gloriously, could be other than a good wife and mother?’

Swiftly the Hungarian shot a glance at Droigel.

‘She knew nothing about Serlini,’ he answered. ‘How should she, wrapped up in her proof armour of pride and prejudice? Serlini is the best of mothers; tender, faithful, as she is beautiful.’

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR FLORENCE.

WE remained for nearly a week in Birmingham, giving two concerts to the inhabitants of that musical town, and receiving much kindness and attention during our stay.

Whilst there we visited all the celebrated places within reach. With my own eyes I beheld Kenilworth, and was not disappointed ; we roamed through the old streets of Warwick—saw the Castle—sat down on the grass to contemplate Guy's Cliff at our leisure—and from the low wall beside the Avon looked upon the stream which had rippled past in Shakspeare's time just the same as it did in ours.

Not, however, to emulate the descriptions contained in local and other guidebooks do I chronicle these facts, but to introduce easily a circumstance which did not much impress me at the time, though it subsequently assumed more important proportions.

At Birmingham Mr Florence called on our party, and joined us in several of the excursions I have mentioned.

Not frequently—half-a-dozen times, possibly—I had seen him since the evening we first met at Sir Brooks's. We perhaps exchanged a few words on each of these occasions, but acquaintanceship of any kind with him I had none.

It was different, however, I soon found, with my companions. They knew him well—they had old associations with the same places and the same people—former memories concerning which they discoursed—over which they laughed.

He had been staying with some family in the neighbourhood, but now he left his friends, whoever they might be, and taking up his abode in the town lived almost with us.

Moreover, where we went he went also ; sometimes travelling

in our company, sometimes preceding our party, sometimes following it ; but always appearing in a front seat at our concerts, and joining us at supper afterwards.

We had only two more towns to visit after leaving Birmingham, and we gave but one concert in each. I am glad now to remember our party broke up before the first dread and trouble inevitable to one in my position assumed a definite shape.

I like—I have always liked—to think of that almost unclouded time of holiday-making. It gave me a kindly and familiar feeling towards artistes that I shall never lose, spite of all their sins and short-comings.

During our tour I grew to regard them as beings not quite responsible for their actions, and even now I often wonder if that impression be wrong—if the line and plummet which may accurately enough define the right and wrong of an ordinary human being can safely be considered to indicate the mental, moral, and physical status of those who, having the genius of gods, retain the minds of children and the uncontrollable impulses of savages.

Let me recall one last incident of our travel. All the singing was over, but we had agreed to spend another Sunday in company. Arriving the previous evening at a small seaport town, famous for the number of Dissenters it contained, and the beauty of the scenery surrounding it, we had planned to take a long drive on the following morning, to eat our luncheon on the hills, and return to a late dinner—Madame Szeregy, who knew the neighbourhood, agreeing to conduct us to a desirable point of view, and bargaining that she should be permitted to attend to the commissariat.

With this arrangement we were all pleased. We knew her judgment in scenery to be as perfect as her judgment in music ; and her taste in eating and drinking to be, if that were possible, more perfect than that in either of the former.

The love of English people for the pleasures of the table has almost passed into a proverb.

To my thinking, the English as compared with foreigners are satisfied with simplicity itself in the way of food. They seem to me very anchorites when, remembering the ordinary bill of fare

of a British gentleman, I recall the feasts ordered and eaten by the inhabitants of other countries.

Certainly since our departure from London we had lived on the fat of the land. Madame Szeredy left nothing to chance—trusted ‘no future, howe'er pleasant,’ in the matter of food. A cook preceded us, as did also wine—an arrangement being, I presume, made with the several landlords which reconciled them to the presence of the one and their guests’ consumption of the latter.

London, or Paris, or Vienna, or whichever great capital may be considered the head-quarters of good living, we took with us. We carried metropolitan ways, manners, conversation, into the country. We had foreign breakfasts, at which we drank claret and ate mutton chops, refreshing ourselves afterwards with rare fruits—peaches, grapes, nectarines, and so forth. Our dinners were generally light repasts—supposing we had dinner at all, which rarely happened during our tour, except on Sundays—but the suppers!—pen and ink cannot depict the variety, quantity, and quality of these repasts.

No wonder, considering the extravagance of our living, the gorgeousness of our attire, the tempers in which we indulged, the marvellous pettiness and unnecessary meannesses of which we were guilty after having perhaps the moment before senselessly squandered pounds, the free manner in which we spoke of Heaven and the devil—words which, though rendered in a foreign tongue, were intelligible enough to the understanding of inn-keeping respectability—that we were regarded wherever we tarried with a mixture of contempt, distrust, and dislike, which gave rise to wonderful *contres*, and tended in no small degree to heighten the amusement and excitement of our tour.

It has struck me since, we were all of us much happier and more agreeable on the days when work had to be attended to in the evening than when left utterly to our own resources.

We delighted in the idea of having nothing to do; but when the time came in which nothing was to be done, we either spent it in gambling or quarrelling.

Never was Madame Szeredy’s tongue so effective in vitupera-

tion or complaint as on those rare occasions when we were neither travelling, nor rehearsing, nor singing.

Judging from our party, I should imagine the whole of Satan's existence must be passed in finding evil words, works, and pastimes for idle artistes.

Were the weather too warm to go out, we hated each other after the first half-hour of enforced companionship. Was it wet, the result was similar, only we hated each other worse. We were children, and we conducted ourselves like children. The only unhappy part of the matter was, that outsiders regarded us as reasonable and responsible beings, and were horrified in consequence by our sins of omission and commission.

It was late on Saturday afternoon when we—the ‘we’ including Mr Florence—arrived at our destination. For many miles that gentleman had been plaguing Madame Szeredy with an account of the reception we might expect, the entertainment we should receive.

Home-made bread, tea, and ham and eggs—the ham salt as brine and the eggs stale—were, he declared, the only eatables for which we could hope.

‘Upon his sacred honour,’ he said, once when travelling in that part of the country he had been obliged to subsist for a week on fat bacon, stale bread, pure water, and the contents of a pocket flask.

‘You talk without knowledge, you know not how to manage,’ Madame replied; ‘you men are all alike, cowards to every one but your wives—content with a crust out of your own homes. Bah ! I have been here too. I sent the provender forward.’

‘They will not let you cook it, though,’ he persisted. ‘To-day is in the speech of the people of this locality, “the preparation for the Sabbath,” and to-morrow is the Sabbath itself.’

‘Well, and what of that ? ’

‘The landlord, you will find, objects to Sabbath——’

‘Pah ! ’ exclaimed Madame, with an accent of intense disgust. ‘I tell you we shall dine this evening, and to-morrow we shall have our picnic.’

The first part of her statement proved correct. Having in

view, perhaps, a design of spoiling the Egyptians, the landlord consented to put his scruples aside, and allow his house to be turned upside down even on a Saturday evening ; but horses for the next day he could not or would not undertake to provide.

This difficulty had, however, been overcome by Madame's indefatigable envoy. Subject of course to her approval, he had secured a boat owned by one of the few inhabitants of the place who was not a Methodist—who was not indeed, in religious matters, of any persuasion—and it was possible to proceed to the spot selected as well by water as by land. He, the speaker, would pack the hampers in the morning should the weather prove fine, but he had delayed doing so as several persons supposed to be learned in such matters had informed him if the wind chopped round there would be rain.

‘Folly,’ exclaimed Madame ; ‘rain with such a sky as that ! and she swept her hand with a theatrical gesture towards the horizon, where, indeed, all manner of glorious tints were blended and blazing together.

After which remark of course further expostulation was useless, and Grégoire withdrew accordingly. Nevertheless I have reason to know he deferred packing the hampers until morning, and he did not pack them then.

What a lovely place that was in which Madame Szeredy had elected to pitch our tent ! The best apartment had of course been engaged for us, and from the windows of the drawing-room the view was exquisite. A broad gravel walk, then a lawn in which beds filled with flowers were cut, then far below the sea, lying calm and peaceful in the evening light.

Through the open casement came the scent of heliotrope, jasmine, and some late blooming mignonette. To the left lay the picturesque town straggling down a steep declivity almost to the shore, and to the right green hills sloped away into the sea, whilst dimly in the distance I could see that headland on the top of which it was proposed we should have luncheon on the morrow.

Before I had taken in every detail of the scene, Mr Florence entered the room. Without turning my head I knew it was he

by a particular scent he affected, which seemed a compound of violets, Cape jasmine, and orange flowers. I disliked the perfume in those days. I detest the remembrance of it in these.

‘Admiring the view, Miss Trenet?’ he began.

‘Yes,’ I answered. My share of our few conversations had hitherto been confined almost entirely to monosyllables.

‘You are fond of the sea?’

‘Very.’

‘Should you care to make a long voyage?’

‘I do not know whether I should prove a good sailor.’

‘Is that the reason you object to the proposed excursion to-morrow?’

‘I have never objected to it,’ was my reply.

‘Pardon me—I employed a wrong word. You are not quite satisfied, you disapprove; is not that so?’

‘When I was young I certainly did not go to picnics on Sunday, if that is what you mean,’ I replied.

‘Consequently now you are old,’ said Mr Florence, smiling, ‘you do not think it quite right to go to picnics on Sunday—that is what you mean?’

‘I suppose it is,’ I agreed.

‘Then shall we refrain from picnics to-morrow and attend religious worship for the benefit of ourselves and those of our party who do not object to having the welfare of their souls attended to vicariously? How should you like that?’

‘I should not like it at all,’ I said, with a rude frankness for which next moment I could have beaten myself.

Mr Florence laughed. ‘Great as you imply your age to be,’ he remarked, ‘you have managed to retain one charming characteristic of youth—candour.’

‘You mistake. I did not exactly mean what my words implied. What I should have said, had I stopped to think, was that whatever my feelings might be, I should not like to set myself up as better than people older and wiser than I am.’

‘Neatly turned, Miss Trenet, and the truth, I doubt not; but scarcely the whole truth—rather a Jesuitical reply for so

transparent and straitlaced a little lady. I preferred, by way of a social novelty, your first answer.'

I took no notice of this speech, but turned towards the window to look out at the view again.

'It strikes me,' continued Mr Florence, 'that you and I do not get on so well together as we should, considering the interest with which I have watched your progress—the pleasure I felt when I knew your success was assured. The first time I began to think about you was—when do you imagine?'

'I cannot imagine.'

'Perhaps you remember an afternoon, long ago, when Herr Droigel, after being at immense pains to make himself presentable to a fancied stranger, appeared at sound of my voice in—Well, we will not particularize.'

'I remember,' I replied.

'And you and his daughter, hearing my greeting, received it with peals of such genuine laughter that I longed to see you both.'

I bowed my head. What could I say in answer?

'Herr Droigel explained, "There goes my babies: they must have their laugh at the fat papa." Being aware he had only one daughter, whom I have never seen since she was a gawky, slipshod, untidy child, with hair the colour of tow, and immense light blue eyes, I concluded the second baby must be a new pupil. Who that pupil was I learned afterwards from Miss Cleeves.

'What! do you know Miss Cleeves?' I inquired, interested for the first time in his conversation.

'Yes.' He said this with the manner of one who should imply, 'I know every one who can be called a "person."' 'She talked to me about Herr Droigel's latest acquisition. She told me how she had first met you, informed me of all the particulars connected with your leaving Lovedale, and told me what I then considered an exaggeration—that you were possessed of a marvellous voice.'

'Miss Cleeves means to be very kind,' I murmured—feeling at once gratified and ashamed—ashamed of the rattlebrain way

in which I knew she must have spoken of me to him : gratified, if the truth must be told, at the compliment implied in Mr Florence's words.

I did not like the man. Intuitively I distrusted, instinctively I feared him ; and yet it did please me to think he admired my singing—thought it really and truly good.

I had not been much accustomed to admiration of any kind, and I was young, and I was a woman !

‘ You are mistaken, I fancy,’ he replied. ‘ I do not think Miss Cleeves means to be anything, but she is a great many things by turns as the fancy seizes her. She is certainly one of the most extraordinary young ladies it has ever been my fortune to encounter.’

‘ She is very clever,’ I remarked.

‘ In what way ? ’ he asked. ‘ She is very odd, but I must say it never occurred to me to think she was clever. Clever people achieve success, or reputation, or money. Miss Cleeves will never achieve any one of the three.’

I was going to tell him she might have had the last, but a thought of Mr Sylvester and ‘ our ladies ’ prevented me.

‘ Pity her cousin would not marry her,’ he resumed, finding I made no comment.

‘ It was the other way,’ I said, with a hurry I regretted afterwards.

‘ Was it ? Very likely. Pity she would not marry her cousin ; might have saved her from much trouble to come.’

‘ Do you think there is trouble before her, then ? ’

‘ I can scarcely imagine Miss Cleeves sailing through untroubled waters,’ he answered. ‘ By-the-by, have you seen her book ? ’

‘ No ; is it published ? ’

‘ Yes, and—but I will not spoil its interest in your eyes ; when you return to London you shall find the volumes awaiting your perusal. We are speaking of Miss Cleeves’ literary effort,’ he added, addressing Herr Droigel, who entered the apartment at this moment.

'Ah ! that Miss adorable——' began the Professor ; but Mr Florence cut across his sentence with—

'Come, Droigel, you never thought her adorable—of that I am certain.'

'There is one thing adorable,' added Madame Szeregy—who now appeared in a demi-toilette which caused our landlady, who met her on the stairs, to uplift her hands and marvel whether the like was ever seen, what the world was coming to, how long the Lord would keep silence, and the like—'eating after fasting. Mr Florence, dinner is ready, and I do not intend to wait another second for any one.'

Taking which hint, Mr Florence offered his arm, and she went 'like any lady'—I quote the words of our landlord—'linked with an Honourable gentleman,' to the head of the table.

Ah, me ! when I looked back to the old days at Lovedale, I often asked, 'Can this be me ? Am I the Annie of that humble home ?' And yet all through the whole affair I never felt, not once, the drama a reality, I never lost the feeling we were all—spite of our dress, our airs, our splendid rooms, our tables glittering with plate, our self-possessed manners, our magnificent personal assertion—make-believes, creatures playing at being fine ladies and fine gentlemen. To me we were masquers : all the time I kept stupidly marvelling when we should throw aside our disguises, and appear before the world in the character of ordinary mortals once again.

Sometimes when I have seen my children play at Kings-and-Queens, a strange sensation came over me. Were the king and queen, the princes and the princesses, one atom less real, though, thank God ! so much less harmless, than that little game at which, enacted by grown-up people, I once assisted ? Mr Florence, accustomed to the ways and manners of the Upper Ten, must, I think, have found the exaggeration of dress, manners, requirements, and personal indulgence he met with amongst us toilers for our daily bread intensely amusing. If he had rested satisfied with being amused, I should not have resented the feeling ; but he sneered at the company with which he

elected to mix—I could see the scoffing light in his eyes, hear the irony in his voice, detect the exaggerated deference he sometimes paid to the members of our party. Day by day I had felt an uneasiness in his presence impossible to define.

He despised us, I determined at length. Why, on that Saturday night I could not form the faintest idea, and for long I lay awake trying to discover the reason.

Before I slept—the wind, as prophesied, had chopped round—driving rain beat against my windows ; I could hear the sullen roar of the sea gradually lashing itself into fury over the waste of waters. I arose and looked out. The night was dark and stormy, but I could see the turbulent, restless waters, weary of calm, tossing hither and thither, deep calling to deep, and moaning mournfully for a reply.

When at length I fell asleep, it was with the cries of storm-demons in my ears, the mutterings of the great waters finding an echo in my heart.

What wonder, then, that I dreamed of that gray old church near the grayer sea ? There one monument stood out in memory before all the others, and I read again as if with my bodily sight the words graven on the time-stained marble, ending with that sentence I had conned over and over while sitting in my uncle's pew, 'The Lord on high is mightier than the sound of many waters.'

When I awoke, which I did very early, the rain was pouring down as though a second deluge had come upon the earth.

It was of no use thinking of getting up or picnicing on such a morning, so I turned on my pillow and fell asleep again.

With what dreary yawns the members of our party greeted each other.

Madame Szeredy openly anathematized the weather. Notwithstanding Herr Droigel's entreaties that she would reserve her indignation till the Christian waiter left the room, Madame used language concerning the rain, the climate, the besotted English fools who dwelt under such a sky, unbefitting Sunday, or indeed any day, and the remainder followed suit. All except Herr Droigel and Mr Florence, the former of whom besought

Madame by his gods, and all other gods known even by reputation to himself or friends, to retain the calmness of her mind, whilst the latter, after maintaining a long and discreet silence, said—

‘ Do you not think, Madame, considering you have the misfortune to find yourself in this island, cursed by Heaven and foreigners, that it might be as well to make the best of a sad trouble, and whilst the rain pours eat your breakfast ? ’

Madame and her guests ate breakfast, but were not appeased. They rang for the landlord—he was at chapel ; the landlady —she was at chapel.

‘ Bring up candles ! ’ screamed Madame, to the astonished waiter, ‘ all you have in the house. Pull down the blinds and shut out this ——’ (here she rapped out a full-bodied English oath which might have delighted the ears of Queen Elizabeth) ‘ sea ! ’

Then they produced cards and played, till I, growing sick and tired of the confusion of languages, the Babel of tongues, the quarrelling, the laughing, the gambling, crept away from the sofa from which I had enacted the part of an onlooker, crept away to my own room [sad at heart—oh ! sadder than words can tell.

Then I took a singular resolution for one in my position—I would go to church.

We had not breakfasted till midday, and it was quite late in the evening, nearly six o’clock by this time. Though there was still a driving rain, the violence of the storm had subsided, and wrapping a thick shawl about me, and putting on a bonnet and veil, I flattered myself I might—spite of being a stranger—pass through the streets without exciting observation. In my dark, quiet dress I slipped out of the hotel, and made my way towards a church I had noticed as we drove along the previous evening.

Alas ! it was closed. There was no service after that in the afternoon, an old woman living in a cottage hard by told me.

‘ I must hear something good to-day,’ I thought (Lovedale, its peace, and its lessons had stood out in strong contrast with my present life during the whole of the afternoon) ; and so

thinking, I walked into the first place of worship I reached, and was accommodated with a seat.

The place was full. No doubt that to many persons was the road to heaven. I hope and trust so; but to me, in my then state of mind, the service seemed inexpressibly wearisome.

Further, when I found our card-playing touched upon, when I heard our party held up as samples of the work of Satan, when I understood we were regarded as non-repentant Magdalenes—as women who tired their hair and wore pillows under their arms—as Jezebels, such as she who was eaten by dogs—as those women who led even the wisest man who ever lived into evil courses, my heart sank within me. But that seemed nothing to being prayed for.

‘Lord, grant,’ entreated the minister, ‘that they may not pass from this world into eternity clad in gewgaws and ribbons and finery.’

‘Amen,’ shouted the congregation. ‘Lord, that it may please Thee these poor benighted creatures may be converted, and, seeing the error of their ways, appear before Thy judgment-seat naked and yet not ashamed, stripped of their silks and satins, their lace and their feathers, and clothed only in the robes of righteousness given out to thy saints.’

Angry, disgusted, and disappointed, I could endure no more. Groping my way like one blind, I felt my way into the open air—no great distance, happily—and revived by the cool night air, hurried back to the hotel.

I did not re-enter the drawing-room, but hurrying up-stairs, undressed and threw myself on the bed.

‘Where in the world have you been?’ said Madame Szeregy, coming into the room a few minutes after. ‘What is the matter, child?’

‘I am ill,’ I said. ‘You are very kind; but please leave me alone.’

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNWISHED-FOR HONOUR.

FORTUNATELY future events testified to the truth of my statement. Next day I was unable to leave my room, which signified the less as the rain continued to pour down with greater intensity, were that possible, than had been the case on the preceding morning. Many visitors came to visit me ; in a variety of tongues enuyed artistes compassionated my state, smothering fearful yawns the while. Towards the evening I essayed to sleep, achieving the result people who are mentally overwrought generally accomplish—that of living in slumber, a dream-life infinitely more wearing and fearful than anything reality can present.

Then suddenly I awoke, with my eyes still closed, to the consciousness that there were people in the room—people talking in whispers. One of them was the landlady.

What had gone before it is impossible to say. This is what I heard.

‘She don’t look much more nor a child, does she, Margaret?’

‘No, ma’am ; and yet Mr Gregory says she can sing as well or better than any of them.’

‘She looks innocent enough, lying there. Too innocent to have begun such a life.’

‘I don’t think, ma’am, there is any harm in her, though she is a play-actor.’

‘I hope no harm may be coming to her then,’ was the reply. ‘I haven’t much opinion of that gentleman who is travelling with them. He has been here before ;’ and then the whispers died away as the pair left my bedside.

Yes ; I had always felt intuitively there must be thorns among the roses of my life, and lo ! they were pricking desperately already.

The following morning was bright enough for the expedition proposed by Madame Szeredy ; but it was apparent to that lady's practised eyes that it would be useless to ask me to join the party.

' You shall not get up until mid-day,' she said, with kindly determination ; ' but then if you are good and better you may come down and bid our friends farewell : they leave this evening.'

' So our pleasant party is to be broken up ? ' I said, with tears in my eyes.

' Yes, dear. Have you found it pleasant ? '

' Yes, indeed,' I answered. ' I like you all so much.'

' Spite of scolding and card-playing ? '

' Spite of anything—everything,' was my reply.

' My child, I love you,' she answered. ' I wish I were not Szeredy, but a fairy who could give you ten thousand a year and place you where I should like to see you.'

She touched my lips and was gone. Ah ! Szeredy, spite of all I know now, I can safely say you hold a place in my heart a better woman would fail to occupy.

And why ? the attentive and courteous reader asks, curiously.

I cannot say why. All I know is that virtuous women may often be intensely unlovable, and to this hour, Szeredy—old, worn, sceptical, cynical—is interesting to me.

The day wore on, and the party returned. Before they departed we dined. That was, I think, the saddest dinner of my life. Let them be what they might, we had been happy together, and I kissed all the women, and all the men kissed my hand in token of affectionate trust and remembrance.

I have seen somewhat of good society since then. I have mixed with people who hold their heads high enough, and have visited and been visited by families chronicled amongst the élite of the land ; and yet were the tide of fortune to ebb and leave me stranded upon the shore of poverty, I would rather ask help—I should feel more certain of obtaining it—from one of those Bohemians whose existence the great world simply tolerates be-

cause they contribute to its amusement and excitement. Perhaps—who amongst us can tell?—when the Great Assize comes to be held, when the nations are had up for judgment, it may chance that impulse will reckon for something both in the way of vindication and excuse—that the open hand, the generous heart will be considered as well as frail purposes, weak principles—morality strong only in opposition to the generally conceived opinions of its use.

I am not a fair critic of the dwellers in this modern Alsatia; still I know the world would be a dull place but for the antics cut by those denizens of it whom Respectability strokes with one hand and slaps with the other.

They were gone, and a pleasant chapter ended with them. There remained Madame Szeredy, Mr Florence, Herr Droigel, myself. It was Herr Droigel's intention to take a cottage in the neighbourhood, where Madame Droigel and Gretchen could join us. It was Madame Szeredy's intention to pass her short holiday with us. This I learned as I lay one evening on a couch drawn near an open window overlooking that walk mentioned as intervening between the hotel and the grass-plot cut up into beds which were filled with flowers.

I had been out on the sands, and feeling weary when I returned in the twilight, entered the empty drawing-room, and taking off my bonnet, lay down to rest ere proceeding up another flight of stairs.

Through the evening air came the fragrance of flowers, and mingling with it the scent of a cigar—it was not being smoked by Mr Florence, I knew, as he had gone to visit some friends.

Soon I heard Herr Droigel's voice, and understood he was the owner of the cigar. He spoke in German, eagerly and rapidly, but it did not occur to me he was talking secrets. Had it done so, I should have moved before I understood the conversation referred to me. When I comprehended I was the subject discussed, no feeling of honour arose to urge that the *rôle* of an eavesdropper was, to say the least of it, scarcely creditable. There are various axioms on this matter, but they cannot concern me now. I heard first carelessly, then I listened eagerly, and—

contrary to the proverb—did not hear much ill of myself. This was the dialogue, carried on (as before explained) in German—

‘ And she can do it, thou thinkest—she is capable ? ’

‘ Do it ? of course she can. Capable ! I repeat, Droigel, clever as we all know thee to be, thou art mistaken about her. Those great women impose on men ; they accept bulk in lieu of brains. Our little maiden shall act to perfection yet, if you leave her to me.’

‘ But these ailments—these headaches—these reactions, I like them not at all.’

‘ You must take the girl as God made her, and your own absurd policy has fostered her. She has not a Southern physique, she has not Northern apathy ; she is sensitive, artistic, affectionate, religious—Heavens ! what a series of inconsistent qualities. You brought her up like a hothouse plant, and now when you call upon her to endure cold and hardship she succumbs at intervals—at rare intervals, however.’

‘ She is a good girl, and I love her.’

‘ Droigel, if you take my advice you will drop that absurd figure of speech ; you do not love her, you never loved anything—not even Madame Droigel—excepting yourself. Love is not a feeling which ever could find entrance into your fat soul. But others may be unaware of the fact and attach importance to words in which there is really no meaning.’

‘ But, dearest Madame——’

‘ Psha ! do not “ dearest ” me. I am not blind : I know all about your present perplexity ; I know your wife is jealous—that she will grow more jealous day by day ; that you are at your wits’ end to think what to do with your prize. Don’t try to deceive a woman who has seen a good deal of what the world is good enough to offer in the way of self-deception, roguery, and villainy. If you could keep your baby unmarried, you would do so ; as you cannot, you favour Mr Florence’s suit.’

‘ I favour him ! I like it not,’ exclaimed Herr Droigel.

‘ Of that I am quite sure, but you are aware Mr Florence is no contemptible match. Let his antecedents be what they may,

he seems inclined to turn over a fresh leaf now. Further, he is in love—sufficiently in love to offer marriage.'

'I should have liked to hear him offer anything else!' hissed Herr Droigel.

'And,' continued Madame Szeredy, 'he is sufficiently politic to make no terms. You have thought over the matter, weighed it, looked at it from every point of view, and you say to yourself in conclusion—it is not bad. Annie will have a protector; she will still earn money for you; she will be an ever-present advertisement, the cause of many pupils, many songs, many good bargains in the future. It is a pity the man is old enough to be her father, and many years to spare; that he has been not merely a libertine, but a scoundrel. But all mundane advantages have some drawback; and for a small person like our little friend, without fortune, family, friends, remarkable beauty—without anything indeed except her own self—which, were I a man, I should fall in love with and marry to-morrow,—for such a little insignificant chit, I say, to secure so great a prize, is marvellous. We know some one beside whom Annie at once becomes a dwarf—mentally and physically—who would have cut off her right hand to win that regard of which this child seems absolutely unconscious.'

'She is unconscious,' said Herr Droigel; 'there can exist no "seem" with Annie.'

'Droigel, if I did not know you so well, I should really think you were smitten with this duodecimo edition of humanity——' began Madame.

'Do not jest,' interrupted the Professor; 'I have enough to bear as it is, merely because I cannot cast out from my heart and home into this wilderness of a world the child so guileless, who has neither father, brother, husband, nor son.'

'For mercy's sake don't be ridiculous,' exclaimed Madame Szeredy. 'There is a man anxious to marry her—why sentimentalize?—She had better marry him and soon, if you want to keep her in the profession. My belief is, and, mark you, unless this affair be brought to a point speedily these words may come

true—once this girl understands what our life really is, what we really are, she will turn from her profession in disgust ; you will have seen the last sovereign Miss Trenet's voice will ever bring you in. I am mistaken if, remaining single, she would not choose to become a governess rather than remain before the public. Married, of course her husband must decide for, and if need be defend her.'

'But there have been women,' cried Herr Droigel, 'innocent and guileless as she——'

'Have there ?' interrupted Madame Szeredy ; 'will you kindly point them out ? There have been women—innocent women, guileless, deceived, heart-broken ; there have been other innocent women deceived who lived to grow wicked and reckless. There have been women who cared for nothing on earth and in heaven but money, and who being able to get money respectably, kept respectable, and no thanks to them for it. But this child, what is she ? Like unto none of them—a poor wild bird who has for her own trouble ventured near the haunts of men. Would we could undo the past, and send her speeding back to that cottage by the Love of which I know she is always thinking when she sings, better than Serlini herself, "Home, Sweet, Sweet Home." ' And Madame in the twilight trilled forth that melody which never seems to pall on the ear of either foreigner or Englishman.

How the conversation continued after that I do not know. I had heard enough, though not, perhaps, too much, and fearful of detection, I caught up my bonnet and hurried to my own room.

Arrived there, I rang the bell.

'I am not so well, Margaret,' I said to the chambermaid who answered my summons. 'Will you tell Herr Droigel I shall not come down again this evening ?'

Half-an-hour subsequently Madame Szeredy stood beside me.

'Be frank, dear one,' she began. 'You may confide fully in me. This malady of yours, it is more mental than physical. What caused the beginning—what reason exists for the continuance of an illness so sudden and complete ? When you were working hard you never complained. Now you are idle, your

head throbs and your pulse flutters. Who has vexed you—what is troubling you? If you want a friend to speak to, talk to me.'

'Thank you, Madame,' I answered; 'but I do not know why I am ill, unless I have not strength enough to lead a life of so much excitement. I have been looking back and thinking a great deal about myself lately; and I do not think I was intended by nature for an artiste. Now I am living in it I feel like a stranger in this land, full of bustle and pleasure; but I shall become acclimatized in time. Assure Herr Droigel he need not be afraid of my breaking down now.'

She had to be satisfied with this explanation, though it was evident she came expecting a different confidence. But even had she been my friend, tried and trusted, how could I have spoken to her about my troubles? When I strove to put the doubts which perplexed—the fears which haunted me into words, even for my own satisfaction, I failed to make out an intelligible case.

As I grew older I could surely decide for myself whether I should follow the path trodden by others or not. If Mr Florence really wanted to marry me, I supposed I need not accept him unless I chose. As to the fresh trial of my powers to which Herr Droigel had alluded, I guessed what it was to be, and I felt no objection to make the attempt. Concerning Madame's jealousy, the idea was too ridiculous to cause me serious anxiety. Thus I argued to myself; thus I tried to reason away the various bugbears which stood threatening me. But let me do what I would, I could not overcome the nervous terror with which I regarded my position. There seemed no firm ground anywhere on which I could trust my foot. What were those people amongst whom my future lot was to be cast? What sort of lives had they led? Why did Mr Florence treat the whole of them with almost contemptuous familiarity? Why did he speak occasionally even to Madame Szeredy as though she belonged to some lower order of creation? I had noticed the fact from the first, and hated him for his ill-breeding.

To me he addressed very little of his conversation; when he did speak it was generally courteously and respectfully; but at times, as though the force of habit were too strong to be overcome,

there was something offensive in his tone and manner which I felt sting without being able to analyze in what it consisted.

Now I was beginning to understand the meaning of Mr Florence's covert sneers and cynical amusement at the habits and modes of thought of people he evidently despised, though their careless, reckless, improvident mode of life suited his own Bohemian tastes. Yes ; I had begun to learn something of the world's ways, and that is a sort of knowledge in which the first step alone proves troublesome.

Already I comprehended the glitter of the tinsel failed to blind Mr Florence. Sweeping dresses, gleaming jewellery, careless expenditure, wanton extravagance, could not impose on him. He took us for what we were. He could not have regarded our doings with more sarcastic indulgence, had we been a parcel of children playing at making believe to be lords and ladies.

All the long night sleep never visited my pillow. Dreams neither disturbed nor refreshed me, for the very good reason that I remained in that territory where realism reigned supreme. I thought over my position till I was worn out with thinking ; but towards morning I fell into a quiet slumber. To perplexity succeeded a great calm. I had been drifting rudderless over a strange ocean. But I would drift no longer. I had been in danger of forgetting the lessons of my childhood. I would try to recall them. I had been in the fear of seeming pharisaical—false to the creeds and traditions I was brought up to revere. But in the future I would, God helping me, enter my protest, silent though it might be, against the utter forgetfulness of right and wrong, the consciousness of which was making me miserable, notwithstanding I lacked strength of mind to take up a decided position in the matter.

For the future I would be no shuttlecock tossed about hither and thither at the will of others. I knew now where I ought to strive to cast my anchor. I saw now where I had commenced the downward descent.

'I will try to be good,' I said to myself, when utterly tired with want of rest and long reflection I settled down to sleep ; 'and to be good I must be firm.'

Pity it is that threescore years and ten oftentimes find men and women ignorant of this undoubted fact.

I was scarcely dressed next morning before the landlady knocked at my door.

'Miss,' she said, giving me a letter, 'this came enclosed in one to my husband, asking that it might be placed in your own hand; so I thought I would bring it to you myself.'

I took the letter; the writing was unfamiliar to me, and I should have deferred opening it but that the woman's look of undisguised curiosity warned me I had better make no mystery of the matter.

'Let me see who my unknown friend may be,' I exclaimed, breaking the seal. As I read I felt the blood rushing into my face.

'No bad news, I hope, Miss,' suggested the landlady. 'The letter to my husband said it was most particular you should have it at once.'

'It cannot be bad news to find one has a friend,' I replied. 'But I confess the contents of the letter surprise me.'

And well it might; for the lines traced in a delicate foreign hand were as follows—

'DEAR MISS ANNIE TRENET,—I have been told that travelling in company with your party is a gentleman you met for the first time at Sir Thomas Brooks's in Park Lane. Avoid him. He is a bad man: he fears not God. He believes not in woman. I have a tenderness for you; but if I had not, you are young and simple. Ah! we were all young once! May angels watch over and protect you from the evil.'

'Ever thine,
'LUCIA.'

Even whilst I had felt faithless, friends were thinking of me. When I returned to London, should I then require help or advice I would go to her.

'I do not know how to thank you and your husband sufficiently,' I said, turning to the landlady, who still

lingered. ‘This letter has removed a great weight from my mind.’

And indeed it had. The effect on my appearance was so great that Herr Droigel greeted me as his fickle Annie, terrifying her fat papa one hour and descending upon him like a thing of light the next.

On the afternoon of the same day Madame Szeredy and the Professor had arranged to inspect a furnished cottage which Herr Droigel proposed to take for a month in order that his wife, ‘for whose absence he was inconsolable, and Gretchen, who never lived save when near Annie,’ should join us.

From this expedition I begged to be excused. I wanted to write to Madame Serlini; I desired to have a few hours all alone to myself on the side of a certain cliff, that was accessible only from the sands; and as Herr Droigel knew to a certainty I could meet with no inexpedient friend in that out-of-the-way spot—the names of every stranger wherein he had ascertained—the pair left me to follow my own devices.

I wrote a short letter to Madame Serlini, telling her I had received her note and thanking her for it, entreating of her not to attempt to correspond with me again, and assuring her I would see her somehow on my return to London and confide in her freely. That done, I posted the epistle myself; and book in hand, walked on to the shore and thence over the firm dry sands to the point I wished to reach. I had noticed the steep narrow path leading up the face of the cliff on a previous occasion, but had not then been able to ascend it. Now—sometimes stumbling, sometimes tripping, always a little unsteady by reason perhaps of want of physical exercise and robust physical health—I reached a point where I could sit down and watch the white-winged vessels as they appeared and disappeared upon the summer sea.

Ah! it was very peaceful there—I could have cried for very happiness and contentment of spirit, and instead of reading I leaned my elbow on my knee, and resting my cheek on my hand thought of what I intended to make of my future. How differently I should try to act hereafter if I could only adhere to

my resolutions, and summon up sufficient strength of mind to say 'No', when it seemed far easier and more amiable and more rational to say 'Yes.'

I had remained thus for a considerable period when I found my solitude was likely to be disturbed. From my perch I could see a gentleman making his way up the path I had followed, and a sudden turn revealed to me the fact he was no other than Mr Florence, whom I had imagined far absent.

In my first hurry I rose to my feet, but second thoughts induced me to resume my seat. I had not expected my courage to be tested so soon. No matter; I knew it must be tried some time.

'I hope you are better,' he began.

'Thank you, I am quite well,' I answered.

'Madame Szeredy and Herr Droigel, both of whom I met on my way here, gave me but a bad account of you.'

'I was ill yesterday—I am well to-day,' I replied.

'Changeable as the wind,' he suggested, but I made no answer; the speech was not in my opinion one that called for any.

'Do you always talk as much, Miss Trenet, as has been the case recently?' he inquired.

'Sometimes I talk more,' was my reply.

'Depends upon the listener, I suppose. You can talk to Miss Droigel doubtless!'

'Yes, I think so.'

'And to Miss Cleeves?'

'No; she does all the talking.'

'That was a pretty little place where you once lived—that "white cottage yonder"—of which I have heard her speak.'

The very words I had used in addressing Miss Cleeves. Clearly she must have been most graphic in her account of our first interview.

'It was very pretty,' I said; 'I loved it dearly.'

'Should you wish to return there?'

'No; all is changed.'

And I turned my eyes seaward, that he might not perceive the tears in them.

There was a pause, then he began again—
‘Miss Trenet !’

‘Yes, sir.’ With a start I came back from Lovedale and its memories, and answered as I have said.

‘Do not call me “sir,”’ he said. (How like and yet how unlike all this was to that interview in the middle of the Love.) ‘I am undeserving of so formal a title.’

‘What shall I call you?’ I asked the question without thinking, and could have bitten my tongue out for its stupidity, when he answered as such a man was certain to answer.

‘Henry, if you will be so kind.’

I did not answer—I was too angry with myself and with him even to attempt to do so ; and seeing this, he continued—

‘Do not look disdainful—I assure you I did not mean to offend, and disdain is not your forte ; your type is quite different to that of a tragedy queen. There, I am transgressing again, and I do not want to do that ; I only want to talk about myself.’

‘A congenial topic’ rose to my lips, but I had enough sense not to utter such a sentence. I was afraid of the man. Even without Madame Serlini’s caution, without the knowledge gained on the preceding evening, I should instinctively have held myself on guard when in his presence.

He was what most persons consider a handsome man, with dark hair, a high forehead inclined to premature baldness, well-cut aristocratic features, a firm, hard, cruel mouth, and eyes that never softened or changed. I feared him. I do not think I could have stood more in dread of a tiger or a leopard. I hated and feared him, and yet he had a power over me—the power I suppose that strong minds always possess over weak.

I was weak—the whole training of my life had tended to make me so ; and yet I felt there was a battle beginning I should have to fight out almost alone.

He threw himself back against the cliff, pillowing his head on uplifted arms.

‘I suppose I have been what nurses and mothers call a bad boy the whole of my life,’ he began, ‘but I do not know, take

it all together, that I am much worse than other people. The sins I committed the whole world was cognizant of. That was my mistake. If I must sin, I should have sinned *sub rosa*, kept a fair external appearance even if black as Erebus within.'

'Do you not think we had better be making our way home?' I inquired, uneasily.

'Miss Trenet, I must read you a lecture,' he said, with mock gravity; 'when a gentleman gives you his confidence, you should at least pretend some interest in the narrative.'

'I do not feel the slightest interest, Mr Florence,' I replied. 'if you have sinned as you state, I should think you would not care to mention the fact, at all events to me.'

'And why not to you?'

'Because you cannot imagine the matter concerns me in the least.'

'But it may concern you.'

'When it does you can make your confession, if you still consider confession necessary.'

'I thought I might touch your heart with a description of my uncared-for childhood, my neglected boyhood, my wild, unhappy youth, the years of my earlier manhood, that were not a whit less miserable. I forgot you had been educated in a faith which considers confession bad for the soul. Once again I beg your pardon—and will go on to say that for the first time in my life I now see good within my grasp, if I can only manage to seize and hold it. Do you understand what I mean?'

I said 'no,' though I understood well enough.

'The first time I saw you at Sir Thomas Brooks's, you excited an interest in me, which from that night has gone on increasing.'

'Mr Florence,' I interrupted, 'I think we ought to be returning to the hotel—Herr Droigel will be uneasy at my absence.'

'Sit down,' he answered, laying his hand on my arm; 'we must remain here until the tide ebbs, unless the worthy Professor sends a boat to our rescue—the sands were wet when I came here.'

'How long will it be before the tide ebbs?' I asked. I knew, but I put the question to gain time for thought.

He had planned this—and I sat for a moment horrified at the idea of how such a tête-à-tête might hereafter be construed to my disadvantage.

Inexperience here stood me in as good stead as experience could have done. My terror was so great that it quickened my wits, and already I had sketched out a plan of action.

'How long?' he answered, laughing at my look of dismay; 'some hours probably.'

'And how deep is the water now?' I inquired.

'Knee-deep, I should say, and rising rapidly.'

I was on my way down the cliff before he had finished his sentence. If the ascent had been steep, the descent naturally proved steeper; but perfectly heedless of danger, I darted down the path. I was young, I was light, I had been accustomed in my childhood to out-of-door exercise, free and unfettered; and deaf to Mr Florence's entreaties and commands—his 'I implore,'—'I desire,'—I sprang down the slippery decline till I reached the water's edge. Without hesitation I jumped in.

'My God, she will be drowned!' I heard from above—and for a moment I had to struggle to keep my position. The water was deeper than I imagined—and I, small and light, was as a cork thrown in.

Only for a moment, however; I caught at the cliff and balanced myself. After that I made straight for land. Sometimes under the waves—sometimes staggering onwards—blinded with salt water—sometimes standing for a moment gasping for breath—but always making my way landward.

Like one possessed I finally plunged and waded through shallower waters, and stood at length shivering and trembling on the shingle, Mr Florence holding me with no gentle grasp.

'I trust you are satisfied now, young lady,' he said. 'Next time you wish to be guilty of such another extravagance, I hope you will choose an opportunity when I am not of the company.'

Had I done something very wrong—very unfeminine? Limp-

ing home in boots sodden and torn—my wet clinging skirts flapping the dust from the white hot roads—my hair soaked with water—my bonnet a mass of straw pulp. I feared I had. Mr Florence evidently was of this opinion ; for he never addressed me once after the sentence I have repeated, except when he said—‘ Let us go in through the garden. We need not let all the world see us in our present plight.’

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT THE RETREAT.

‘ MISS TRENET, will you favour me with five minutes’ conversation ? ’ asked Mr Florence.

We had dined and we had partaken of coffee, and I, seated on a bench placed in one corner of the lawn, was looking out over the darkening sea.

I rose in answer to the request, and drawing a shawl more closely around me, prepared to pace the lawn in his company.

‘ We can talk here,’ he suggested. And when I resumed my seat, he placed himself on the bench at a little distance from me.

‘ I am afraid,’ he began, ‘ I was very irritable and unreasonable to-day. Will you forgive me ? ’

‘ I do not wonder at your feeling irritable,’ I replied ; ‘ I beg your pardon for acting so foolishly, and for giving you so much trouble.’

‘ I deserved the trouble, and you did not act foolishly. I was wrong, I confess it, frankly. I ought to have told you the sands were wet ; but you cannot imagine how often I had tried to find you alone, and the temptation was irresistible. You were quite right, however, although it certainly mortified me not a little to see you flying from me as if I were an ogre.’

If he expected me to make any reply he was disappointed. Never, I think, was wooing conducted under greater difficulties.

Perhaps he felt this, felt he might as well make a plunge at first as at last, for he said—

‘I tried to see you alone, because I wanted to ask you a simple question—this. Will you marry me?’

He took my hand; and remorseful concerning my former bad behaviour I let him keep it; not that it could be considered much of an acquisition, for it lay in his like a piece of ice.

‘I do not want to marry any one,’ I replied, my courage as usual failing me just when I stood in most need of its assistance.

‘That is no answer to my question. I did not ask you to marry any one. I asked you to marry me.’

‘I cannot marry you.’

‘Why not? Do you dislike me?’ he went on, finding I remained silent.

‘I do not know,’ I replied.

‘You do know perfectly well,’ he persisted; ‘but there, I will not torment you with questions. I will not ask you what you have heard to my disadvantage, or from whom you have heard it—why you regard my simplest actions with distrust and fear, and shun me as if I were going to do you some grievous injury. All I will ask you now is this. Give me a chance of winning your favour. I will do my best to deserve it. If I am fortunate enough to gain your affections, I will try with all my soul and strength to make you happy. You shall sing or remain silent just as you please. You shall have everything my love can suggest or money procure. I have not been so good a man as I now wish from my heart I had striven to become, but I will be true and faithful to you.’

‘Oh! Mr Florence, do not, please do not talk in that way. I cannot bear it. I feel so false listening to such words when I know it can never be—never!’

‘Have you any other lover, Annie?’ he asked, gently. ‘You need not fear telling me. If you have, and that he is worthy of you, I will go away and never afflict you with my importunities again.’

‘No—none,’ I said, almost in a whisper.

‘Are you quite certain, dear?’

‘Perfectly certain.’

He had held my hand all this time. He now touched it with his lips.

When I drew it away, he said, ‘Forgive me.’ But he came a little nearer in spite of his penitence, and began—

‘As that is the case, you must in common fairness give me a chance of winning you. I do not wish you to bind yourself in any way. You have seen little of the world, and it is only right you should see more of it before you tie yourself for life. I know many people would consider I was offering you a great deal. I am rich. I am well born. As my wife you would have the entrée into the best society ; but, on the other hand, I am not so stupid as to forget what you would give me in return. Your youth, your genius, a past pure and innocent as that of a child ; a temper sweet and trusting as that of a saint. When I think,’ he added, passionately, ‘of what you are now and of what may be in store for you, I feel as if I must take you away by force and marry you to keep my darling from even the knowledge of evil.’

I could not answer. I was crying at the picture so cleverly suggested to my imagination.

‘Droigel told me,’ he went on, ‘not to speak to you yet. He said, “She is still in all matters outside her art a baby. Think of the seclusion in which she was brought up before I knew her —of the convent-like existence she has led with us. I have kept her as the apple of my eye. She is a sheet of white paper.”’

‘Herr Droigel does talk such nonsense,’ I exclaimed, laughing, in spite of myself and my sobs, at Mr Florence’s admirable imitation of the Professor’s accent.

‘To which I answered,’ continued Mr Florence, “‘May I ask you how long you expect to keep her a sheet of white paper ? Do you imagine for a moment she can mix amongst artistes and remain simple as she is now ?’” Whereupon Droigel said, with a shrug of his mighty shoulders, “There comes a time in the life of all when we say of him or her we have done our possible, the boy or the girl, the man or the woman, must be his or her own fate—begin to weave the web of destiny for himself or her-

self. I fear not the good Gott in Himmel will see that my little orphaned Annie comes to no bad end."

'Mr Florence,' I asked, 'if you have such a bad opinion of artistes, why do you associate with them ?'

'Formerly for the reason that habit is a strong bond ; latterly, because I wanted to see as much of you as possible. And now,' he continued, 'I am going to bid you good-bye. I shall be away from here before you are awake to-morrow morning. You know all I desire—all I hope. Give me as many kind thoughts as you can spare till we meet again at Fairport.'

'At Fairport ?' I repeated.

'Yes ; has not Herr Droigel told you ? : Why cannot he be frank and straightforward with you ? Lady Muriel has set her heart, or that part of her anatomy which does duty for one, on getting up some operas, in which of course she is to appear ; and we are all to assist in humouring her ladyship's whim. Good-bye, child, and remember my parting words. I loved you from the first moment I saw you come forward in your black cloudy dress, with your young white frightened face to sing your little song.'

And before I even anticipated his intention he was holding me in his arms, kissing me over and over again.

This was the result of my boasted strength and courage—a victory at midday, an ignominious defeat in the evening.

I had compromised myself, and I knew it. Well, I would try to repair the error.

Hurrying to my own room, I wrote him a note which was no doubt a masterpiece of inconsistency and absurdity, and which must, I am certain, have amused so astute and experienced a gentleman not a little.

This was the reply I received next morning by the hands of my own messenger, Margaret—

'I think I understand all you feel, and would express, better even than you do yourself. Do not grieve over the irremediable. If I may never be your husband, you cannot prevent me always remaining your friend.'

Truly it was a nice cleft-stick in which I was placed. For a

few hours I felt confident in my own strength and my own courage, but now I understood I never should be able unassisted to extricate myself from the web of trouble in which I was enclosed. But for the thought of Madame Serlini I believe my spirit would have fainted away, that I should either have run off or succumbed. As it was supported by the thought that if I could once return to London help would be near, I held up bravely, much, I could see, to the astonishment of Madame Szerey and Herr Droigel.

Within a few days we too left the hotel and took up our abode at the cottage where we found Madame Droigel and Gretchen.

The former greeted me with a frigid kiss, the latter was affectionate as ever.

‘You have had an offer, I hear,’ she said, as we walked up and down the morsel of common-land which did duty both for garden and lawn.

‘Who told you that?’ I inquired.

‘Pa told ma, and I was present,’ she replied, carelessly; ‘and you refused it!’

To this statement I made no answer.

‘I only wish he had proposed to me,’ she went on, after a pause.

‘Dear Gretchen, you cannot be serious,’ I expostulated.

‘Am I not?’ she exclaimed. ‘Let Mr Florence try, that is all. If Beelzebub—concealing, as in duty bound, his tail and his cloven hoof—came and asked me to marry him, saying, “I can give you carriages, horses, servants, and so forth,” I should at once tell him to have the settlements drawn out and the licence procured. Anything to escape from my present life.’

‘Has it been so unhappy?’ I asked; ‘it has seemed happy to me.’

‘Because you are an idiot,’ she replied. ‘If you were not a born simpleton you would understand all this man could give you—wealth, rank, position.’

‘I have no desire to quarrel with you, Gretchen,’ I replied; ‘so if you please we will not discuss the question.’

‘Who do you suppose has the next villa to this?’ she inquired, accepting my decision with as much amiability and ready quickness as her father himself might have evinced.

‘How should I know or guess?’ I replied.

‘Mr Merrick’s brother-in-law. I met Mr Merrick on the sands yesterday, and he and Mr Waterton called this morning.’

‘Is Mrs Merrick dead?’ I inquired.

‘You wicked Annie!’ she exclaimed. ‘No; Mrs Merrick’s health is quite re-established.’

‘Is Mrs Waterton dead?’ I asked.

‘There never was a Mrs Waterton; at least no Mrs Waterton, wife to this gentleman. He is a bachelor.’

‘Well, Gretchen,’ I answered, ‘make your hay while the sun shines. Gather roses—gather roses; it is not always May.’

‘Nannie, what has come to you?’ she said, rubbing her smooth cheek against mine. ‘You are not the Nannie you were when you went away.’

‘Possibly not; we all age and change.’

‘Are you vexed with me?’

‘No, indeed, Gretchen.’

‘Or with papa or mamma?’

‘No;’ but this was more doubtful.

‘Have you guessed what the trouble was I spoke of?’

‘Yes, I know.’

‘Who told you, did Mr Florence?’

‘No, Gretchen; never mind how I know, I do know that and some other things also. You remember even kittens can see after nine days.’

‘I fancy some day you will hate us all.’

‘I think not,’ I replied; ‘some day I may say, “There is a little to forgive,” but I shall never, I hope, forget what I owe in the way of gratitude.’

‘Annie, I wonder if you know that I love you really and truly?’

‘I am sure you do,’ I answered. ‘But you do not love me one-half so well as you do yourself—which is only natural.’

‘Do you love yourself?’ asked Gretchen, trying to trap me.

'I hate myself,' I replied. 'I am, as you said with more truth than politeness, an idiot, and I detest idiots.'

'Heyday!' cried Gretchen.

Of the days and weeks which followed I have little to tell. They were spent in almost continuous practice. To an advanced pupil like myself, Madame Szeredy proved a better mistress than Droigel was a master.

She never could or would have toiled with me through the first days of study, but now that I comprehended my art to some small degree, she was an efficient, laborious, and valuable teacher; she swore at, but she taught me; she cursed the day, the hour, the minute when she ever undertook the education of a pupil so dull, but when I had conquered the difficulty she forgot her disgust, and embracing me declared, 'Couldst thou but forget everything and every one for music, there is no height to which thou mightst not aspire to climb. There are parts in which thou shalt make a grand *furore*.'

There was a great passion on me in those days for work—an intense desire for musical triumph impelling me onwards. I wanted to rise high—to do something wonderful—to prove I was strong in art if in nothing else. I desired to soar out of my present existence into some sphere where I should feel free—where I might be my own mistress, and choose my own companions, friends, occupations. Beyond all, I wished to succeed when I went to Fairport. If I made a *fiasco* at The Retreat, it would be worse for me, I vaguely felt, than my small triumph had seemed good. As Gretchen said, I was changed. Sometimes the Professor cautioned me, gently—

'Take care, Annie, take care; do not rush on too fast.' But I did not heed; I abandoned my old idols and began to consort with new. Opera was for me now all in all—I threw my heart, soul, and strength into this branch of my profession as I had never flung one of the three into ballad singing.

'Oratorios would be more in thy line,' he suggested.

'She shall do all, if you will only leave her to me,' exclaimed Madame Szeredy, impatiently; and I was left to her, whilst Madame Droigel and her husband strolled along the sands, and

Mr Waterton and Gretchen commenced a flirtation which soon advanced to love-making, and after a sufficient period ended in marriage.

It might have ended in marriage sooner, had I accepted Mr Florence when he first asked me; that would have thrown a glory of respectability over the whole family, which at first, I fear, we all wanted in the eyes both of Mr Waterton and his sister, Mrs Merrick, who asked me many questions with a view of discovering 'all about the Droigels,' in which endeavour she signally failed.

Was I a wretch that, after having lived for years with these people, I should turn traitor and bare the secrets of their home for her edification?

Gretchen and she agree admirably. Gretchen has accepted the life and ideas and employments of those amongst whom her lot is cast, with an adaptability to me simply incomprehensible. Mr Waterton never suspected she had marked him for her prey from the first moment he was introduced to her by Mr Merrick. She told me this quite frankly, for which she was subsequently punished by many alarms lest I should reveal that fact to him, or else another—namely, that she did not care in the least for him, but loved his position more than can be imagined.

She is very fond of him now. He gives her all she wants, and her wants are many—but I should not like to guarantee the fondness lasting if he were ruined to-morrow. I hope he will never subject her affection to that test.

Sometimes there recur to me memories of various tender passages which occurred between Gretchen and a young German to whom she fancied herself devotedly attached. They came to nothing, happily for both; and Gretchen fondly hopes I have forgotten all about his existence. It does not matter. Not a pang of jealousy shall ever disturb the rest of Mr Waterton—whom Herr Droigel calls 'that specimen John Bull husband, so kind, so wise, so rich'—if my silence can preserve him from it.

To this hour he believes Herr Droigel to be one of the most credulous, guileless, and child-like of men, and it is unlikely he

will ever now change his opinion. I see no necessity why he should.

Before this person Gretchen spoke much to me of Mr Florence, introducing his name in a manner which would at one time have struck me as extraordinary. I was growing wise, however, and the fairy dust failed to blind me. Of my own goodwill I never spoke of him. He was never out of my thoughts, but I kept my thoughts to myself.

Just as a child going down a long dark corridor walks on silent, though tremblingly afraid of encountering a ghost, so I walked on silent, dreading the encounter with my ghost, which was indeed coming very near.

The day at length dawned. I was going back to Fairport. After years, and years, and years, I was to see the familiar houses, the well-remembered bay, the weather-beaten church, and that old monument, the memory of which always comes back fresh and vivid whenever in the darkling twilight I hear the words—

‘Lighten our darkness, O Lord.’

Sir Brooks’s carriage met us at the station. Time had brought a railway as well as other strange things to Fairport; and as we drove along the Parade, past my uncle’s house, where I caught a glimpse of Mrs Isaac dispensing tea to the family, my heart beat so fast I could make no answer to Herr Droigel’s ceaseless chatter.

Past the church! How gray, and [aged, and shrunken it looked to me, half hidden amongst the billows of graves that rose so high around! Past the house where I once heard Miss Cleeves singing ‘Rory O’More,’ and whistling to herself in the balcony. Oh! what centuries seemed to have come and gone since then. Out of the town altogether, out into the lonely country beyond, over smooth sandy roads to The Retreat.

‘It is not a dream, Annie,’ said the Professor, as we turned through the gates and whirled up the avenue. ‘It is real; and thine own voice has wrought this miracle.’

‘Welcome back to Fairport, Miss Trenet,’ said a voice that

*swept aside all illusions, as we stopped before the hall door, and Mr Florence handed me from the carriage, and escorted me into the house.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

LET Lady Muriel's faults be what they might—and spite of her divine impulses, or perhaps, indeed, because of them, the world said she had plenty—that of making her guests miserable was not one of them.

In her house all men were equal, and for that matter, all women too. Gentle or simple she treated us alike, except perhaps that for artistes rather than for her other guests she had more frequent words—that we received more gracious courtesy from her than she extended to those of her own rank in life.

That was the first time I ever stayed in a grand house, or found myself surrounded by great people; and on the whole it did not prove so terrible an ordeal as I expected.

'This is the life, Annie. This is living,' said Herr Droigel to me rapturously, as we wandered through the conservatories on the morning after our arrival. It was a life he revelled in. The luxury, the ease, the magnificent house, the respectful servants, the eating, the drinking, the talking, the fruits, flowers, lawns, shrubberies, delighted his sensuous, contradictory nature. He could scarcely restrain his ecstasies.

'It is this,' he said, 'which is the English speciality—this country life at once so cosmopolitan and so retired—so unrestrained, and yet so refined. Ah! Annie, pity we were born only poor musicians, and not lords and ladies.'

He was amiability itself. Never had Droigel's character appeared more simple, more infantile, more susceptible.

Nevertheless he saw everything ; saw that Lady Muriel would act only with Mr Florence, that Sir Brooks wished us all individually and collectively at Jericho, or even a more distant bourne, saw that Lord Fortfergus was a conceited, impecunious, superficial old dilettante, whose opera——. ‘Ach, well,’ he said ; ‘we talk of dat no more. He will have to be sung, so we need not to pull faces.’ He saw that for some reason Miss Cleeves, who was of our party, did not affect my society so much as formerly ; saw that the Misses Wifforde, our ladies, were stately and disappointed women ; saw, before I did, there was something amiss with my uncle ; saw that even the delight of hearing Tommy shout out ‘The British Grenadiers,’ and sing a comic song in character, failed to remove a cloud from Mrs Isaac’s brow and restore her wonted volubility. In short, nothing escaped my master.

There was one person he could not understand, however—Miss Cleeves. He watched her, he talked with her, he talked of her.

‘That Miss, she is so droll,’ he remarked to me over and over again. ‘She baffles, she feigns, she defies.’ He said this one evening to Mr Florence, who at first only laughed in reply. They remained talking together for a few minutes ; then Herr Droigel’s face clouded, and he walked out ‘with his thoughts’ into the night.

‘Miss Cleeves seems a mystery to you no longer,’ I observed the next day.

‘Ah, no, little one ; but we must blindfold those bright eyes You must not grudge me my own poor pleasure.’ I love a mystery —to me it is as a child’s puzzle—that amuses and pains together ? once put together, the pleasure is over.’

‘Then you have put Miss Cleeves together ?’

‘Yes, and we will put her away. Amongst those great people she treats thee a trifle cavalierly, it strikes me,’ he said. It had struck me too, but then Miss Cleeves’ moods and tenses were not unfamiliar to me.

The same evening she said, ‘I am inditing a letter to Syl. Have you any message I can convey to him ?’

‘To Mr Sylvester?’ I exclaimed, opening my eyes in amazement. ‘Certainly not.’ Then, thinking my words sounded scarcely civil, I added, ‘I hope he is quite well.’

If I had been able to peep over her shoulder, and read the letter she sent, the knowledge would not have added to my comfort. As it was, I went on my way happily ignorant of the contents of that epistle.

I saw it at a later period. This was how it ran:—

‘THE RETREAT,

‘Tuesday night.

‘MY DEAR SYL,—No doubt you have been anxiously counting the days, and watching the posts, in expectation of my promised letter. Here it is at last, and I have hosts of things to tell you. But first, let me ask why you would not accept Lady Muriel’s invitation? She says she wrote *pressingly* begging you to come, and seems rather offended at your refusal. But that is of no consequence. Nor is her Ladyship of much. She does not grow wiser as she grows older; and she has scandalized the old ladies to such an extent, they repent having accepted her invitation, and wish they had been able to prevent my beholding so much of the world’s wickedness (at one time) as is to be seen in this house. I only wish I had seen as little of it as they have in any house, or rather I do not. Existence without a slight knowledge of sin is as soup without salt, somewhat insipid.

‘We are a very large party, and I have enjoyed the visit immensely, the horror and dismay of our respected relatives adding not a little to my pleasure. They asked me after Droigel had been squiring Aunt Dorothea through the gardens who he was.

“Can you tell me the name of that distinguished-looking foreigner?” were Miss Wifforde’s words, whilst Miss Dorothea added—

“Who speaks English so well.”

“I think he is a Count Albrecht von Droigel,” I answered. “I have seen him at the Dacres.”

"That girl with the dark eyes is his daughter, is she not?"

"His adopted daughter. His own real child is as magnificent a specimen of creation as the Count himself."

"Would you believe it? for three whole days the darlings received Droigel's devoted attentions with that kind of amiable condescension with which English people always treat distinguished foreigners. And they went out of their way to talk to Annie—who answered—"No, Madame"—"Yes, Madame"—"Thank you, Miss Wifforde." You know her silly frightened way, looking ready all the while to run off and hide.

"So exceedingly shy," said Miss Wifforde. "Do you not think we have seen some lady very like Count Droigel's daughter?" asked Miss Dorothea.

"The same idea occurred to me," remarked Miss Wifforde; "but of course amongst the number of families we have known in our long lives we might have met with some relatives of Miss Droigel." And then the old darlings tripped along, holding up their brocaded skirts, and exhibiting their silk stockings, and fanning themselves, and looking as if they had gone to every ball at Almack's in their youth, and spent the remainder of their lives in going to Court and visiting the nobility and others throughout the United Kingdom, besides frequenting all places of fashionable resort on the Continent.

"I hoped, I did hope I should be able to keep up the deception. What with their utter ignorance of the French language out of a book, and their want of knowledge of German and Italian under any conditions, I was nearly successful. Little Trenet really has improved her opportunities, and though her accent is vilely German, speaks French wonderfully fluently. And in that language I discoursed to her, whilst I held forth to Droigel—dear, fat, delightful Droigel—in German. So I meant to pass them both off as amateur musicians. I had told our aunts that abroad every Prince wrote an opera, and every Count played the violin or piano, and that every young Princess understood thorough bass, and every Countess sang from

the time she was able to say whatever may be the short for Müder.

‘The fact that Lord Fortfergus had composed the ineffably idiotic opera which was the *raison d'être* of our being at The Retreat, lent a sufficient colour of truth to my fictions.

“‘You remember, dear,” said Miss Dorothea, “that Elizabeth's father played remarkably well on the flute.”

“‘Yes, and poor Lady Brooks, Sir Thomas's first wife, composed a song called ‘The Nightingale,’ which she published for the benefit of the Fairshire County Asylum. Somewhere at the Great House there must be a copy of it. We bought fifty.”

‘Nothing could be going on better till the night of the performance—last night—but I shudder to think of what then befell, and so hurry on.

‘Hunter summoned me from the ball-room, while for an instant I was standing still, talking to the most heavenly waltzer who ever descended to earth—Mr Florence—with this remark, “If you please, Miss Cleeves, you are wanted in Miss Wifforde's dressing-room most particular.”

“‘She is not in a fit, is she, Hunter?’ I asked.

“‘She is very ill, Miss Elizabeth,” said the stately maid.

‘Of course I at once thought about the succession, and you and myself, and whether she had made a will, and where it was, and so forth.

‘With a sad face I entered the dressing-room. “We shall not require you any more, Hunter,” said Miss Wifforde. “You can withdraw, and close the door.”

‘Syl, they were both there in their night-caps and dressing-gowns.

“‘What is the matter?’ I asked. “I thought from Hunter's manner you must be ill.”

“‘We are ill,” said Miss Wifforde. “Elizabeth, you have intentionally deceived us. We have been enlightened to-night. That Droigel, your Count, is a music-master, and that girl he passes off as his daughter is the grand-daughter of Mrs Motfield. She is an actress—she is going on the stage.”

‘I spare you what followed. Little Trenet had done the thing too well for an amateur. The old ladies had their wits about them to an extent for which I was not prepared. They inquired, they heard, the curtain falls. I will draw it up to-morrow on a different scene.

‘To-morrow has come, and we leave to-day. I am so sorry. I was enjoying myself to a degree perfectly indescribable. I wish I had held my peace about Droigel and that stupid Annie. The amusement obtained is not worth the price that will have to be paid. Really I am beginning to think, with our respectable relations, that it is better to have nothing to do with people who sing or play, or act or write, beyond reading their works, or paying money to hear or see them perform.

‘They always get one into trouble in the long run ; whilst as for composing oneself—— But I see you in imagination laughing at my change of opinions, so will give no further cause for merriment.

‘I made my peace with the old ladies—never mind how ; but cleverly and effectually ; and Miss Wifforde is not without hope that in the peace and retirement of the Great House, I may forget the riot and dissipation which prevail in this establishment. Lady Muriel says she is “so sorry we are going ;” but I believe she is very glad. I am sure I should if I were she. Sir Thomas, as usual, says nothing, but I fancy he is sorry. The old ladies can play propriety well if they can play nothing else.

‘But if Sir Thomas could only believe it, he has not the slightest reason for jealousy now. Mr Florence is about to be married, and the happy lady is——I will give you three guesses. No, I will not. You shall have the delicious tit-bit at a mouthful. The happy lady is Annie Trenet—Mrs Motfield’s granddaughter—and she will be the Honourable Mrs Florence. No wonder our relatives fly from The Retreat as Lot did from the cities of the plain. If any one of the trio be turned into a pillar of salt, it will be me, for I shall certainly look back with longing to the only happy time I have passed since I left London. You will come down of course to the Great House very shortly now,

and I will prepare another budget of news for your especial edification.

‘Yours affectionately,

‘E. CLEEVES.’

‘I re-open my letter to tell you Herr Droigel and his adopted daughter have just returned from Fairport. She with cheeks red for a wonder, and eyes swelled up with crying—a fright. I asked Annie what was the matter. She answered, “Nothing.” I asked Herr Droigel. He replied, “Our Annie is a plant so sensitive.” I asked Mr Florence. He said he did not know, and I told him he ought to know.’

‘Midnight, Lovedale.

‘We have arrived here safely. We are surrounded once more by the eternal silence of this dreary house. No more dancing, no more flirting; nothing but prayers, pride, and propriety.

‘Mr Florence and Sir Thomas saw us to the carriage. I said to the former, “When you are married, do you think Annie will let you waltz?”

‘“I cannot tell,” he answered, “but I am quite certain I shall not allow her to do so.”

‘“Miss Cleeves,” observed Miss Wifforde, as we drove away from that delightful place, “you permit yourself a strange latitude in your remarks to gentlemen.”

‘“I only wish I could, aunt,” I replied, plaintively. “My remarks would then be a vast deal more amusing than they are now.” I wish I knew what Droigel’s baby was crying about to-day. That name fits her to a nicety.’

Miss Cleeves’ remarks concerning my manner and appearance when I returned from Fairport were quite correct. I had been crying, and tears are not becoming to every one. Further, I was much vexed in mind, and annoyance is not always conducive to the maintenance of that calm which all human beings ought to preserve externally. A great trouble had fallen upon me, outside my profession, outside of Mr Florence. Something was the

matter with my uncle, and all my inquiries failed to elicit from him what that something might be. At last I bethought me of questioning Mrs Isaac. As usual she was communicative; for once she was civil. She thought it was quite right of me, she stated, to want to know the reason of the change in her poor dear husband. He had forbidden her to mention the matter to me; but there were times (many I imagine) when, in her opinion, obedience in a wife became a sin. It was very hard upon her, careful as she had always been, and saving as she had tried to be for the sake of her family.

But what was the trouble I wanted to know? 'She could not exactly tell, except that Isaac and his brother Daniel were answerable in some way for an uncle of Mrs Daniel's. If I remembered she had never thought much of Mrs Daniel or her people, for all she held her head so high, and gave herself airs as if her husband's family were dirt under her feet.'

'I did not pay much attention either to Mrs Daniel or her affairs,' I said, finding some answer was expected, and conscious that my recollections of Mrs Isaac's feelings did not tally with her own report of them.

'And well it would have been for some other people if they had paid as little,' she replied; 'it will kill your uncle. It is not as if even he had not paid down Jemima's fortune, poor dear. We shall have to give up this house and sell everything, I suppose,' she added, looking ruefully at the various articles in the room, and then suddenly she gave way and broke into passionate sobs.

'Don't cry, aunt,' I exclaimed; 'it cannot be so bad as you think—we—I can surely do something to help uncle.'

'But it's a mint of money,' she said; 'you, what could you do, child?'

'I do not know,' I replied; 'but I will do something if you only tell me all about the matter.'

It was very little she was able to tell. She had heard nothing except from strangers. And then she covered her face with her hands again and bewailed herself, whilst I wept for sympathy.

Just then Herr Droigel, who had arranged to call for me, entered the room.

‘ Bah ! ’ he ejaculated, ‘ this is bad. What has happened—what is the trouble ? ’

When we told him he said, ‘ You must not despair, dear Madame; there may be a tiny track found out of the forest. This good child and I will talk all over, and come back ; yes, we will come back.’

‘ You want to help the dear uncle, Annie,’ he remarked, as we walked along the shore to The Retreat, in order to avoid meeting people. ‘ I think I see a way if you object not.’

‘ Object ! I would cut off my hand to help Uncle Isaac.

‘ Well then, I fancy I see a ray of light.’

‘ But you must not ask Mr Florence to help,’ I exclaimed, a sudden suspicion crossing my mind.

‘ No, no, no, no ! ’ answered Herr Droigel, vehemently ; ‘ that would be bad, so bad. It shall be a little secret between you and me ; you must see the other uncle and learn all from him ; then we will set our wits to work, and when we leave this so enchanting Retreat act. Think of it, Annie, that through poor Droigel you may be able to render such help as shall enable that good man to weather his storm.’

This was how it came to pass that after morning service, which we all duly attended at St Stephen’s, I found myself seated by the side of Jemima’s husband driving inland to Deepley.

Jemima’s husband evidently considered himself a sadly injured individual. Some one had suggested he ought to return his wife’s fortune, or endeavour in other ways to assist his father-in-law.

‘ But of course, Miss Trenet,’ he said, ‘ my friends would not hear of such imprudence for a moment ; a man must look to himself.’

‘ Of course,’ I assented. Even had I been inclined for argument, I well knew discussion in that case would have proved worse than useless.

When Mrs Daniel learned my name and errand she received me with open arms. She at once made me free of that drawing-room, the furniture in which had trembled in the balance. Ah !

how strange it seemed to me to think I had once been low-spirited because the glories of her abode were about to be revealed to my cousins—glories concealed from me.

‘Dear ! dear !’ she said ; ‘and so you are Annie ! I always thought you would turn out something wonderful ; when your Aunt Jane declared you would never be fit for anything but moping about, I stuck up for you. “There’s a deal of outcome in those quiet girls,” I said—those were my very words. And so you are staying at The Retreat, and went to church to-day with Sir Thomas and his lady, and sat in the family pew—only to think of it ! and but the other day, so it seems, you were a bit of a child, and old Mrs Motfield living, and all the family grudging you the food and shelter you got at the cottage—all except me and my dear husband.’

‘Your memory is shorter than mine, Mrs Daniel,’ I remarked. ‘I recollect the time when you did not entertain a very favourable opinion of me ; but we will let bygones be bygones. I have no wish to recall the past, unless you force me to do so.’

That silenced her ecstasies, and during the remainder of my visit, which lasted only long enough to rest and feed the horse, I talked principally with my uncle—a man who had never liked me, and whom I had never liked, and who evidently did not believe that I should be able to assist him or his brother.

‘Why did not Isaac tell her how he was placed if he thought she could be of any use?’ he said, in answer to his wife’s entreaties that he would explain everything.

I could have told him why, but I did not consider it part of my mission to state that Uncle Isaac’s ideas were as widely removed from those of his brother as the east is far apart from the west.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MY OWN SECRET.

THIS is a letter I received from my Uncle Isaac some time after I left Fairport :—

‘MY DEAR NANNIE,—I never thought the day would come when I should feel ashamed to write to you, but I do now. I have taken your future earnings, allowed you to mortgage your little property, perhaps run the risk of keeping you poor for life, and all this makes me feel very miserable; but when I think how you have saved both me and my brother from ruin, how you have enabled us to keep our homes together and obtained time for us to work out the balance of our indebtedness, so that our children may not be beggars and our homes destitute, I cannot but believe it will all be repaid to you in God’s good time a hundred-fold.

‘When the trouble is over, and the danger, through your help and that of our good friend Herr Droigel, averted, friends start up unexpectedly. A Mr Florence called upon me the other day. He left Lady Muriel sitting in her carriage whilst he came in and asked if he could speak to me for a moment in private.

‘He said he had heard indirectly of my embarrassments, and as he took the liveliest interest in you and all connected with you, he hoped I would allow him to place his cheque-book at my disposal. He seemed vexed when I told him I required no further assistance—that, thanking him most gratefully, all the money I required had been provided.

‘Spite of his kindness and generosity, I am afraid I do not like Mr Florence, Annie. It is said here you are going to marry him, and that it is a wonderful match for you to make.

‘I think if there had been any truth in this report you would not have left me to hear it from strangers. He stayed talking

to me for so long that I got fidgety, and ventured to remind him Lady Brooks was waiting.

“Let her wait,” he said, impatiently. Fancy that—and she a lady, and he her guest. “She would come with me, though I did my best to escape ;” and then he spoke about you, until at last I had to ask him to excuse me. There were customers wanting prescriptions made up, and no one but a boy to attend to them, so he went away promising to call again. I am glad to say he has not done this. Write to me soon, dear, and tell me whether I am to believe what is said or not. I cannot think you would marry merely for money or for rank. I reproach myself now that I saw so little of you while you were here.

‘Reverting to my own affairs, I have had another offer of assistance—namely, from Mr Risley, the principal solicitor in Fairport. It seems as if your help had brought me friends and good fortune, for business has never been better, my neighbours never more kind.’

‘What says the dear uncle?’ asked Herr Droigel.

‘He fancies he has beggared me,’ I answered. For various reasons I did not think it necessary to tell him anything about Mr Florence’s visit or proffer of assistance. I failed to understand Herr Droigel’s real wishes regarding my future. I fail to understand what they were still, though I have a theory on the subject.

‘Ah ! you will soon bring all that to rights,’ replied the Professor, gaily. ‘You shall appear with Serlini and carry the house.’

‘Is that true ? Will she permit—will she listen to the idea ?’ I cried, trembling with excitement.

‘She is delighted,’ replied Herr Droigel. ‘She is graciousness itself.’

How I studied no one can imagine ; how I tried to perfect myself in this new branch of art surprised even the Professor.

Much of my new energy was displayed in order to rid myself of Mr Florence, but he did not seem to resent it ; on the contrary, he only laughed when Miss Cleeves, who did not now visit us so much as formerly, spoke of my distressing industry.

‘Miss Trenet will have more leisure to place at the disposal

of her friends when the season is over,' he remarked on one occasion, when Mr Sylvester chanced also to be of the company. 'At present everything connected with operatic life has for her the charm of novelty.'

'Then you really intend to go upon the stage?' said Mr Sylvester to me in a low tone, whilst Miss Cleeves was cross-questioning Mr Florence about a song he had introduced into Lord Fortfergus' opera, and Herr Droigel was reproducing the melody on the piano. 'I did not believe the report—is it true?'

'Quite true,' I replied.

He did not say he was glad—he did not say he was sorry ; he turned the conversation to some indifferent subject, and shortly after took his leave.

'He thinks I must fail,' I thought. 'Well, he shall see.'

Had I not been intoxicated with the fascination of the new life opening before me—had I been able to adhere to the resolution made far away from London, to prevent my senses being deluded by the deceptive glitter which at that time surrounded me, I must have shrunk from crossing the threshold I had reached.

But the glamour was upon me ; I was back amongst the pleasant people of old. I had no leisure for thought or for fear. I was proud of what I had been able to do for my uncle, and of what those with whom I was thrown in contact said I might do for myself. I never recollect during the whole of that period feeling alarmed concerning my ultimate destination but once. I had been singing at a concert of sacred music, and Madame Dellaro, who boasted the deepest and most disagreeable voice I ever heard in my life—people called it a contralto, I called it a baritone—was to see me safely back to the Droigel mansion. Perhaps for the sake of home peace the Professor did not accompany me everywhere himself as formerly, but consigned me now to the care of this friend, and now of that.

On the present occasion Madame Dellaro, wishing to leave before it was possible for me to do so, asked another friend to take charge of me. This friend—a grievous sinner, who had a knack of 'singing religion,' to quote her own phrase, with the

most holy and sanctified expression—with eyes upturned to heaven and a look of devotion in her face and attitude which a saint might have envied—said to me as we drove along, in that foreign accent which seemed more familiar than English—

‘Just you come into my house for one moment; I want you most particular.’

I did not like going in, for hints and rumours of the life she led had reached even my ears; but she laughed at all my excuses, and, as usual, I had not sufficient strength of mind to persist in taking a decided course. When we alighted she said something to the coachman which I could not hear, and then hurried me up-stairs into a room brilliantly lighted, and filled with company.

‘Caught so beautiful!’ she exclaimed, turning to me and breaking out into a peal of laughter. ‘Now you stay for supper.’ I did not say her nay or yea. Stay to supper I determined I would not, for amongst the persons assembled I saw the faces of several whose acquaintance Madame Serlini had cautioned me against forming with the united strength of all the languages she spoke.

Herr Droigel, too, had not been silent concerning some of them. ‘Be civil, Annie,’ he said, ‘but nothing more. Say “yes,” “no,” “good day,” “good night.” Talk as little as you can help.’ And here I was in their midst.

‘I have one crow to pluck with you,’ said the hostess, turning to a gentleman near her, none other than Mr Sylvester. ‘I begged you to come so hard to my supper and you declined—“Non, non,” you were engaged elsewhere—and now, at the asking of Monsieur Neville, I find you here before me.’

‘Ah, mademoiselle!’ he replied, ‘I wish I could plead that it is never too late to repent of an error, but the fact is I really cannot remain—I am going to Herr Droigel’s.’

‘You can go to Droigel afterwards.’

‘A thousand thanks, but I must go to Droigel now.’

‘What is the special attraction there?’ carelessly asked Mr Florence, who was of the party.

‘Business,’ was the answer.

All this time I had been thinking how I was to escape. If I remained, Mr Florence would, I felt satisfied, offer to escort me

home, and the tête-à-tête I had been striving for so long a time to avoid must take place. Fortunately I had not yet removed my shawl, and only thrown back my hood, and noticing a door half concealed by curtains, I asked a lady near me if I could go into the next room to arrange my dress.

There was a second door in this room, opening on to the staircase, and without stopping to leave any message or apology, I ran down into the hall, passed through the porch, and found myself in the open air. Before I had reached the outer gate, however, Mr Florence overtook me.

‘My brougham is here,’ he said, ‘if you will do me the honour of making use of it.’

‘And I am here, Miss Trenet, if you will allow me the honour of seeing you home,’ added Mr Sylvester, coming hurriedly forward.

Involuntarily I passed Mr Florence with a slight curtsey and cold ‘Thank you—I prefer walking,’ and took Mr Sylvester’s offered arm.

‘May I inquire,’ asked the former, after we had proceeded a short distance in silence, ‘by what right, Mr Birwood, you claim to be this young lady’s escort?’

‘I have no right,’ was the quiet reply, ‘except that of having known Miss Trenet, less or more, nearly the whole of her life-time.’

‘She will take her death of cold,’ remarked Mr Florence; ‘and if she does, Herr Droigel will scarcely, I think, thank the friend of her childhood for having induced her to walk home in thin shoes and an evening dress. My brougham is close behind. Do you not imagine you would be acting the part of a judicious guardian if you were to permit me to set you and your ward down at Herr Droigel’s instead of aiding and abetting Miss Trenet in her endeavours to catch bronchitis?’

‘You are very kind,’ answered Mr Sylvester; and without consulting my wishes he paused to let the conveyance overtake us.

Mr Florence opened the door for me, and then with a bow stood aside to permit Mr Sylvester to follow, after which he got in himself.

It did not take us long to reach the Professor's door.

'Shall you be long here?' asked Mr Florence, as Mr Sylvester was bidding him good-night.

'Only a few minutes was the reply.'

'Then, if you permit, I will wait. I should like to have a little conversation with you, and we can talk on our way to your chambers.'

Whatever it might be Mr Sylvester had to say to Herr Droigel he said in private, and it had the effect of rendering the Professor thoughtful for the remainder of the evening.

Next day Mr Florence was closeted with him for full an hour, and after his departure Herr Droigel spoke to me concerning the offer that gentleman had done his Annie so great honour as to make.

'Do you not remember what you told me long and long ago?' I asked when he had quite finished his statement and his comments on the beauty of Mr Florence's affection and the generosity of his proposed settlements. 'You said an artiste should never marry. You were right, and I mean to follow your advice.'

'But to all rules there are exceptions——' he was beginning, when I interrupted him.

'I shall prove no exception. I suppose I ought to be grateful to Mr Florence, but I am not. I suppose I ought to like him, but I cannot. I would rather die than marry him. I would sooner beg my bread than live in a palace with him.'

'Softly, softly!' exclaimed the Professor, 'you are not on the stage now. This is a very grave question. You have received an offer most remarkable, and you must not throw a jewel of price on one side as if it were of no value at all.'

'I will not marry Mr Florence.'

'Well, well, well, this obstinate child must have her way. She shall not be opposed or irritated. She shall show her little airs and expend her fury on the boards, and then we will talk once more. She will learn wisdom as she grows older—learn that Droigel, with all the will in the world, cannot give her everything she would have—that the poor Professor, though he

was able to teach her much, cannot stand for ever between her and the evil of this wicked world.'

And solemnly shaking his head, Herr Droigel left me to my own reflections.

But for the engrossing thought of appearing with Madame Serlini, I scarcely know how I should have got through the weeks which followed—weeks during which I tried to banish the ever-recurring question of what plan for the future I must form—with whom I must live, where I ought to go.

That I could not remain at the Droigels', I felt confident; that if I could, it was neither fit nor expedient for me to do so, each day satisfied me more and more.

Droigel could not take charge of me as he had once done. Madame, even had she been willing, was unfit to take the care of any one. I was not old enough, wise enough, clever enough, to take care of myself.

What Herr Droigel had said was quite true. I had neither father, brother, mother, or sister; and without a husband, a woman so lonely occasionally finds her position difficult.

The momentous evening arrived. It is a very different thing, singing in a concert-room and coming forward to the footlights and uplifting one's voice to stalls, boxes, and galleries: but this is a part of my experience on which I have no desire to enlarge. I never can recall that night without a terrible longing that the past could be undone—that the airs might be unsung, the acting prove a dream. I shrink when I think of having appeared before such a multitude in even so small a part as that allotted to me. In the moment of my greatest success, I see again a pair of wistful eyes fixed upon me with such a mournful, regretful expression, that my own filled with tears, and louder than the applause which followed, I can hear the throbbing of my heart, which at last understands its own mystery, comprehends the length and the breadth of the gulf stretching between it and happiness.

What were congratulations, compliments, [prophecies of future successes to me after that? What was it to me even

that Madame Serlini herself said, speaking over my shoulder to Herr Droigel—

‘She is a good girl ; if she takes pains she may do great things yet.’

‘You have not found it all pleasure, as you expected,’ said Mr Florence, softly. ‘I feared there might be a disappointment.’

‘Not satisfied yet, little maiden ?’ asked Herr Droigel. ‘Why, what wouldst thou have—what canst thou want ?’

‘Take me home,’ I whispered, both my hands clasped round his arm ; ‘take me home—please, do.’

We drove back in silence, and when we re-entered the house, I would have gone to my own apartment at once, had not Herr Droigel, saying he wanted to speak to me, entered the drawing-room and closed the door after him.

‘Annie,’ he began, ‘what ails thee, my child—what is the trouble ?’

I sat silent for a minute, stupefied with the misery that had been so suddenly revealed to me. I knew what I wanted to say as well as I knew what I intended to do, but my lips refused to utter the words that rose to them.

‘What is the trouble ?’ he repeated, in a tone which, though gentle, left me no choice but to answer.

‘I shall never try to act again.’

‘And wherefore not ?’

‘I dislike it.’

‘You dislike it. Why ?’

‘I do not know—I cannot tell.’

‘Think again, dear child ; think once—twice—thrice——’

‘I cannot tell,’ I said, defiantly.

‘Shall I tell ?’ he asked. ‘Sit down,’ he continued, as I rose and tried to free myself from the grasp of his great, soft hand, which held me as if in a vice ; ‘you are not a child, I am not quite blind—you are in love. Bah ! with a man who cares not for you—who will never care for you.’

‘Oh ! no, no,’ I murmured.

‘Oh ! yes, yes ; poor little one, whom from my heart I pity. But this folly we must try to hide—the world would not pity, it would laugh, or cry fie, fie ! Say, Annie ; if it be hard to thee for me to probe thy secrets, how could it be borne for strangers to turn thy sacred fancies into ridicule ?’

‘I have no fancies,’ I exclaimed. ‘You are wrong, Herr Droigel, utterly and entirely. I have never thought, I have never known——’

‘There comes a moment of revelation.’ he said, as I paused, confusion covering me ; ‘it may be thou hast not hitherto thought—thou hast not heretofore known, but the mask is off now ; thou hast looked into thine heart and seen. But there must be no more of looking and seeing,’ he went on, speaking determinedly ; ‘with me your secret is safe—buried—dead ; none other must know it—not one. We must have no more faltering, no more weakness, no more babble of abandoning a career which may be splendid——’

‘I shall abandon it,’ I interrupted ; ‘I shall never sing again in opera—never.’

‘Ah ! my dear, you will think twice about that ; you will think more than twice before you give the world’s big tongue liberty to wag about this thing so foolish ; you will cry all through the night, possibly ; you will spend your grief, and then you will to-morrow come to me, having seen the folly of taking a dead love to nurse, and say, “Help me to hide this sorrow. Tell me how I shall dig a hole so deep, and press the earth over it so that no one may dream it has ever been. Remind me that I owe much money, that I must earn gold to live. Tell me I am no great heiress who can afford to fling away bank notes for the sake of an illusion. Repeat it is shame to be won unsought—unmaidenly to give love when it has not been asked, where it is not desired.”’

‘Do you think you have said enough,’ Herr Droigel ?’ I asked, rising and steadyng myself for a moment ere I essayed to walk.

‘I hope so,’ he replied. ‘I never want to have to say anything about it again.

He had said more than enough for me. Somehow I made my way up-stairs into my room, turning the key inside.

After that there is a blank. The next thing I remember is lying on the floor with the moon shining into my chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE HEIR COMES TO HIS OWN.

WHAT Herr Droigel said was true: I had no such store of wealth I could afford to follow my inclinations; whether the work were to my taste or not, I must do it. Whether I had learned to hate publicity or delight in living before a multitude, signified nothing. I had but one profession, and it was necessary for me to pursue it; but one gift, and I had perforce to use it.

Though I did not weep through the night, though I did not spend my grief, morning, as the Professor had prophesied would be the case, brought sense with it, and I resumed my labours as if nothing unusual had occurred to change the whole current of my ideas.

But the current was changed nevertheless. I worked harder than ever, but I only worked that my labour might sooner have an end. I tried my best to please the public, but it was only that I might be able all the earlier to bid the public an eternal farewell. Vain would it be to deny that applause still gave me pleasure, that silence filled me with dismay. To the last hour of my life the clapping of many hands, the huzzahs and encores of many voices, will stir my heart as the sound of a trumpet stirs the blood of a war-horse which has once listened to its call; but the moment I was off the stage, the moment I retired from the platform, the old sick feeling returned, and I felt in my soul it was all vanity.

That I was deceiving Herr Droigel's intelligence, and delud-

ing all others with whom I came in contact, I firmly believed ; never thinking the Professor was reading me like an easy book, and that some who were interested in my future noted every change of humour, every caprice of temper, as carefully as my master himself.

I had no friend. Gretchen was occupied with her own affairs, and had it been otherwise I should scarcely have taken her into my confidence. Miss Cleeves came to see me but seldom, and when she did, made herself increasingly disagreeable. From the time I told Madame Serlini of Mr Florence's offer, her manner froze towards me. I had no friend, so far as I knew, and perhaps it was as well, since a friend of whom I knew nothing was watching over my safety.

So days and weeks passed by, monotonously it seemed to me, for there is a wonderful monotony in work of any kind ; and the time when I was anxious concerning my success—when I was doubtful whether I should be able to sing in opera so as to please a critical audience—had faded into the mists of an apparently remote distance. Looking back, I cannot think the reputation I then achieved was built on a solid foundation. Years alone can prove whether the success of a singer is the result of adventitious circumstances, or real merit, and my success must be attributed to many causes altogether foreign to either voice or merit.

I was young, and the public are lenient as well as partial to youth. I sang with Madame Serlini, who was in herself a tower of strength ; who, when she chose to help, could almost insure those associated with her performing well and singing their best.

The principal male singers took a kindly interest in me, whilst Mr Florence exerted an influence which was not slight in obtaining generally favourable comments on my powers from the press.

Whatever talent I might have, had every chance therefore of recognition and development. My career was short and sunny ; my way lay across green fields, along shady lanes, over paths bordered by flowers, under arches crowned with roses. The frosts of winter, the decay of autumn, the rain, and the sleet,

and the snow, were outside my experience ; and it is only those who have outlived the keen winds of criticism, the adverse judgment of the select few, the indifference of the many—the difficulties which beset, the obstacles which retard all who are trying to win name and fame—that can tell of what metal they are really made. Had I continued in my profession I should have known more of my own capabilities or the want of them than I am ever likely to be acquainted with now. But an end was coming to that career on which I had so longed to enter. It came when nothing was further from my thoughts, and in this wise.

We were ready one night to leave HER MAJESTY'S, but Herr Droigel had not come to fetch me as agreed.

Madame Serlini, who could not brook being kept waiting for an instant, but who did not like leaving me alone, was fuming over his delay, when Mr Florence, who had volunteered to find the Professor, returned.

'Herr Droigel is not here,' he said, addressing me, 'but he has sent a fly, and the driver says his orders were to come for you first, and then to call for Miss Droigel on his way back.'

'He has made a mistake,' I replied ; 'he was to call for Gretchen and her father on his way here, but it does not matter. Good night, Madame ; good night, Signor ; good night.'

It was to be good-bye to that life, but I did not know that.

Mr Florence and I walked up the Arcade together. The night was dark, the rain falling in torrents. Madame Serlini's brougham stopped the way. I knew her pair of bays, recognized her coachman, who sat with the rain splashing from his coat, and the footman, who stood just within the Arcade, and who touched his hat to us as we passed.

My companion put up an umbrella, and drew my arm a little closer in his.

'I am afraid you will get wet,' he remarked ; 'your carriage is the last of all.'

Almost running, we hurried along the soaking pavement. Mr Florence turned the handle of the door ; I had my foot on the step to enter, when some one caught my disengaged hand,

and, pulling me back, said, 'That is not your carriage, Miss Trenet. Come with me.'

'Interfere with this lady at your peril,' exclaimed Mr Florence.

'Interfere with her at yours,' was the reply; and before I could recover from my astonishment, Mr Florence was lying prone on the pavement, and a crowd beginning to collect.

'In Heaven's name, what is the matter? what has happened?' asked Madame Serlini, turning to my companion for an explanation.

'Take her home with you,' he answered. 'I will be with you early to-morrow.'

'With me?' repeated Madame, in amazement; 'did you say home *with me*?'

'Yes; she will be safe with you,' was the reply. 'I must see Droigel at once. Good night.'

'It is like a bad dream,' exclaimed Madame, and taking my hand in hers, she held it fast all the way to her own house.

'Annie,' she said to me next morning, 'when Mr Birwood wrote to you it is a pity you did not at least answer his letter.'

'He never wrote to me. I never had a letter from him in my life,' I replied.

Mr Sylvester was standing beside Madame Serlini, and I turned to him to confirm my statement, but he gravely shook his head.

'I wrote to you,' he began—'wrote a letter which I feared you thought dictatorial and impertinent, because you did not know—how could you?—what your going on the stage meant to me.'

By this time Madame Serlini had left the room.

'I never received such a letter,' I said; 'what was it about?'

He told me it was to implore me not to appear in public again, but to marry him if I was not afraid of comparative poverty.

'If you received that letter now, what answer would you give me?' he inquired.

I know what I ought to have done. I know I ought to have refused him decisively, but I only said—

‘Oh, Mr Sylvester, how you ask me to ruin your prospects—to spoil your life.’

I will not repeat his answer. It is enough for me to tell it was no longer any shame for me to love him—that I had found friend, hero, brother, husband, all in one.

Would there were space to tell what Droigel said to me and I to Droigel when, later in the same day, he called to see his ‘impulsive Annie.’

That our interview was not pleasant may be gathered from the fact that when he was leaving I refused to shake hands with him.

‘I forgot the years,’ he said, plaintively. ‘I was a woman all over. When he told me it was best for me to have few friends and doubt every one, I pouted ; when he let me have my own way and make friends and believe in all, I blamed him because harm nearly came of it. Well, he could wait. After all, I was only following my nature, only displaying another trait common to my adorable sex.’ And after administering this consolation to himself, he departed.

We were not married in London, but at Little Alford. Dr Packman gave me away ; Miss Packman was my bridesmaid ; and we spent a quiet honeymoon, as beffited those who were not, for some time at least, likely to be overburdened with this world’s goods.

I had not a sixpence. The house at Little Alford was mortgaged, my small fortune spent, my earnings in Herr Droigel’s pocket. The agreement I signed at the time of Uncle Isaac’s embarrassment bound me to the Professor for years. How difficult it proved to obtain my release from it I did not know until long afterwards ; but I was released, and as I never have sung, so I never shall sing in public again.

In entering upon my new life only two things troubled me—one, that his marriage had placed an insuperable barrier between my husband and the Wifforde estates ; another, that Miss

Cleeves resented her cousin's choice even more bitterly than did her aunts.

'You have ruined his prospects and cursed my life,' was the pleasant sentence in which she summed up the extent of my delinquencies. 'It was an evil morning that on which I ever saw you. If I had known what I was doing, I would rather have bitten my tongue out than taken any notice of you—given you ideas above your rank, induced you ever to think a man like Sylvester would condescend to look at a girl in your station.'

'But, Miss Cleeves,' I remonstrated, 'what can it matter to you ?'

'What can it matter to me ?' she repeated. 'I loved him as you could never love anybody ; ay, and I should have *made* him love me back again had it not been for your demure face and simple ways. There ; don't cling and cry to me, you baby ; you have broken my heart ;' and having so spoken, she left me.

'Was it really true she ever cared for you ?' I asked my husband. 'I always thought ; that is, she always implied——'

'I know,' he answered, 'it pleased her that the world should think I was a rejected suitor, and yet it is as true that I once gave up all hope of being heir to the Miss Wiffordes because I would not marry her, as it is that I have now given up all desire of being their heir because I would marry you.'

'And you do not repent ?'

'I shall never repent,' he said, earnestly.

There came, however, a day when the olive branch was sent to him—when 'our ladies,' saying they should like to see him once more, requested his presence at the Great House, but he declined to go without his wife. Had I known I should have begged him not to let me prove a bone of contention—but I did not know till another letter arrived asking us both to visit Lovendale.

I did not enjoy staying with my husband's relations. It seemed to me, courteous as they were, that their whole time was occupied in watching my actions, noting my words, criticizing my manners ; and, besides, there was one ever-present thought oppressing my soul—namely, that through me Sylvester had lost

all chance of succeeding to those broad lands, to all the wealth and consideration that but for me might one day have been his. Nor were my spirits rendered any better by the news which reached the Great House not long after our arrival, that Miss Cleeves had made a most wretched marriage. For forty-eight hours Miss Wifforde kept her room, resolutely refusing to be comforted ; and when she reappeared she looked years older, and was fain to avail herself of my husband's arm as she walked with him along the terrace and up the walks that wound in and out amongst the dark pine trees.

Our visit had by this time extended far beyond the period originally fixed for our return, and though it proved very dull, miserable, and uncomfortable to me, I had not as yet ventured to hint that I was wearying to be back in our own modest house, which seemed to me so much more home-like than the Wiffordes' great rambling mansion.

At length, however, I broke silence.

'I hope you will not think me selfish for asking such a question'—that was the way in which I introduced the subject—'but when are we to leave here—when shall we go home again ?'

'Do you want to get home again ?' he inquired.

'Very, very much,' was my reply.

'Then we will ask Miss Wifforde,' he said, smiling. 'Aunt Laura,' he began, leading me to the room where, arrayed in stiff silks, 'our ladies' sat doing Berlin wool-work, 'my wife wants to know when we are to go home ?'

'My dear,' said Miss Wifforde, in reply, and the hand which held her needle shook a little, though her voice never trembled, 'we hope you will stay here always—it is fit the heir should reside on the property which will one day be his.'

'Do you mean—oh ! what do you mean ?' I asked, looking from one to the other.

'We mean,' answered Miss Dorothea, kindly, 'that we are about to place a great trust in you : the maintenance of the honour, the keeping of the dignity of an old name.'

For a minute I could not speak. Then I replied, 'I will try to prove myself worthy of that trust.'

‘We are not afraid of the result,’ said Miss Wifforde, and rising from her chair she kissed me solemnly; after which Miss Dorothea did the same.

It was like a religious ceremony—I am sure it produced the effect of one upon my mind.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

It is a summer’s evening: sunshine is flooding the landscape, bathing woods and plantations, lawns, fields, flowers, in a glory of golden light. From the window near which I am seated, the Love, murmuring among its stones, a calm peaceful rivulet on its way to the great sea, is distinctly visible. Shading my eyes I can discern the stone on which Miss Cleeves and I held our first colloquy, when our lives had still to be lived, when the future seemed all mysterious, when the past was as yet but one day taken out of the spring-time; and summer, autumn, winter were all to come.

Ah! how long ago since I and the brown thrush tried conclusions, since I conquered him ignominiously, and sang my song till his was silenced.

How many thrushes have sang on that bough since then? How many other Annies have during the interval made their curtseys to a British public? Questions like these make one feel old. The fresh actors are coming on; ever and ever we hear the faint echoes of departing footsteps—the sounds growing louder and louder of those which are approaching.

Aspirants for the laurel wreath are constantly pressing forward; those who have won, those who have lost on earlier fields, they have passed, they are passing away.

They come, they go. Between me and the setting sun I behold the dim figures of a shadowy throng: men and women I

have known ; men and women I may never know ; men and women who existed before I ever came into being—they are there—a mighty company—who have fretted or are fretting or will fret their way somehow across the marvellous stage of life.

It is enough—I turn away my eyes and take up my pen once more. Some day another tale will be written about me, but not in three volumes. A legend will be carved about me, for copies of which the most inveterate novel readers will not clamour, and refuse to be appeased.

Amongst other things *that* is coming. I am reminded of the fact by looking at an aged woman, who sits where she can sometimes lay her left hand on mine ; though she has lived far, far beyond the period allotted to man, she still retains her faculties. She is feeble, she is paralyzed, but she lives—she enjoys : she enjoys the sunshine in the summer, the blazing wood fire in the winter. In all respects she is changed. She likes me to sing to her what she calls ‘good songs,’ and she loves still more to hear scraps of manuscript read over. She likes the sound of the children’s laughter, and she and Hunter, who bears her company when I cannot do so, are content that I am Sylvester’s wife, that our children should be Wiffordes of Lovedale.

‘If I go first,’ Miss Dorothea says, speaking as well as her infirmity will permit, ‘you promise, Annie, that Hunter shall stay here till she dies too?’

‘Yes, aunt, I promise—for Sylvester and myself, and our sons and our daughters.’

There is no lack of an heir now at the Great House, and a different place it is, I ween, to the gaunt, solemn, almost uninhabited mansion upon which my childish gaze used to fasten itself in curiosity and in awe.

Miss Wifforde lived to see some of these changes—lived to see a girl born, whom we named after her. She was christened Laura Cleeves Wifforde, and Miss Wifforde’s last words to me were—

‘If *she*,’ well I knew whom she meant by ‘she,’ ‘ever comes back, you will be true to her, dear.’

‘True for ever,’ I answered. Would she would give me the

chance? I hope, I pray, I believe, that woman who fancied I wronged her may yet give me an opportunity of showing how deep and lasting is my love. There must come an hour when her heart will turn back with tenderness and yearning to those who are so faithfully her friends, and I never see a stranger coming up the avenue without a feeling of expectancy. I never in the twilight look towards the long French windows opening on the terrace without a fancy stirring within me that the wanderer will yet stand at one of them and beckon me to her with the imperious movement familiar of old.

The Cottage has no tenant. It was a fancy of mine to keep it vacant and put in as caretaker an old servant who lived with us there when I was a tiny child. So far as was possible the rooms are furnished and ornamented as they were in the days when the Great House viewed from below appeared an awful and inscrutable mystery—a continent between which and me stretched the waters of an unknown ocean.

Now from the windows of the Great House I look down on the humble abode from which I have risen to such a mighty honour, and no amusement I can offer to the children ever affords them such keen enjoyment as the proposal to have a picnic at the Cottage. They delight in the small rooms, the old-fashioned furniture, the lavender, the gilly-flowers, the beds of thyme, the humming-bees, just as I delighted in the same things before they were thought of.

They never weary of hearing how ‘mamma lived here when she was a little girl,’ and how papa, when he was young, used to ride past on a great black horse, and how mamma from one particular window watched him. The water from the well has a special sweetness to their fancy—it is colder than the water at the Great House, and clearer also, they conceive; and an acme of happiness is attained when after having filled the kettle for themselves they bring it into the kitchen and watch it hung to boil over a crackling wood fire.

My life has, in comparison to the lives of others, been almost uneventful. Now that the poor story is told it seems to me, thinking of the few real incidents recorded, scarcely worth the

telling ; but I have been very, very happy—I am happier than words can express ; and that in a world where happiness seems the exception, sorrow the rule, is something to chronicle.

One of our children is called Annie. She has but this moment returned from the Cottage, and her little hands are full of flowers gathered in its old-fashioned garden.

Close to my side she comes, the little face eager with the energy of a new purpose ; the dark eyes darker with the excitement of a new idea of a fully developed plan.

‘When I am married——’ she begins. Mark ! there is no doubt in her mind about the matter. It is not, ‘If I ever marry,’ ‘If I ever am asked to marry,’ but straightforwardly, without doubt or a shadow of turning. ‘*When I am married, I shall live at the Cottage ; that shall be my home.*’

I take her in my arms. The flowers fall from her hands, and cover me with leaf and blossom.

The scents of the old days are around me. I hear the birds singing, and the bees humming, and the melody of an old, old song is in my ears, and the Great House and the Cottage are both the same to me at last. To my thinking there is no tenderer conjunction of words possible than that contained in the sentence
‘HOME, SWEET HOME.’

THE END.



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